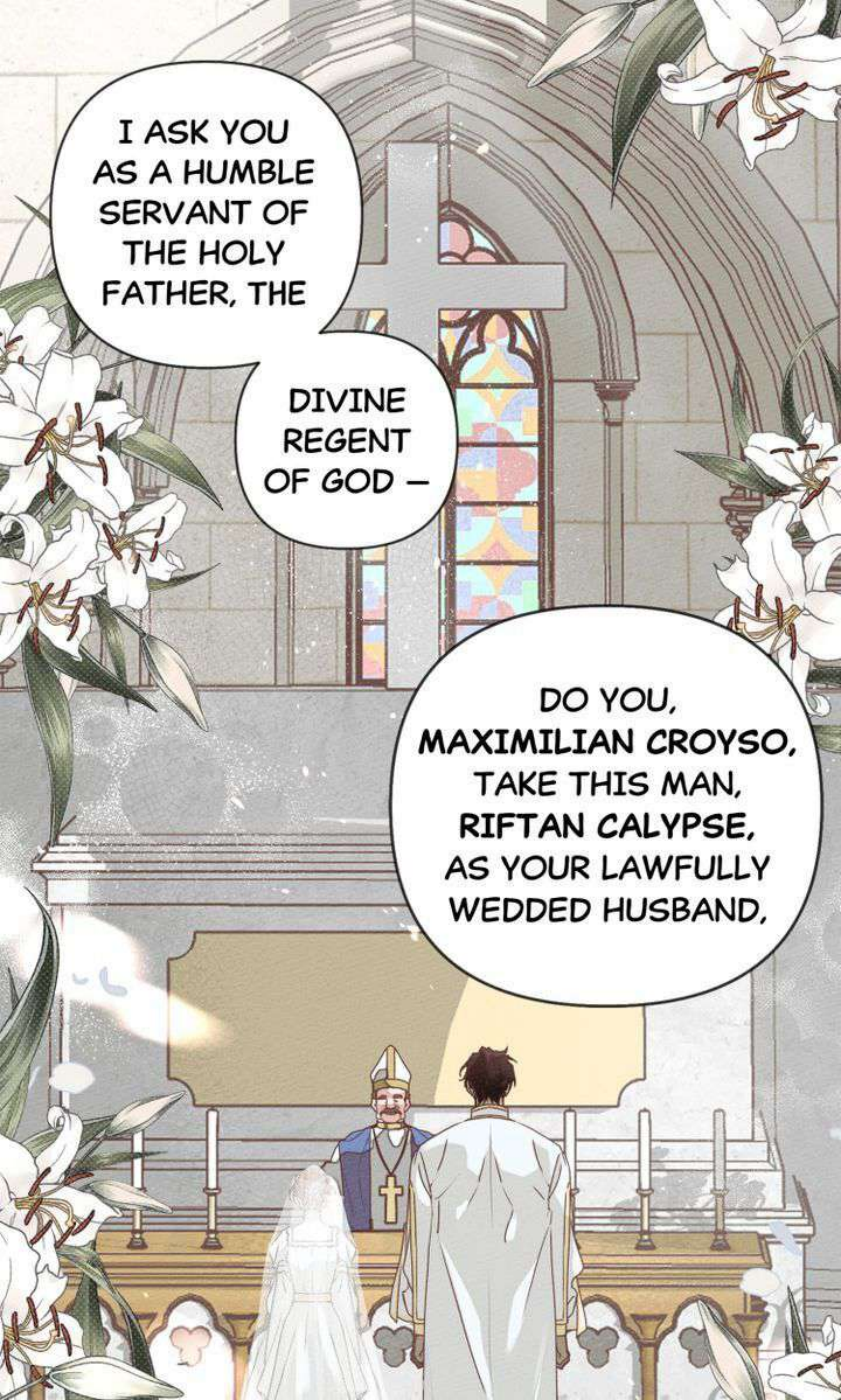
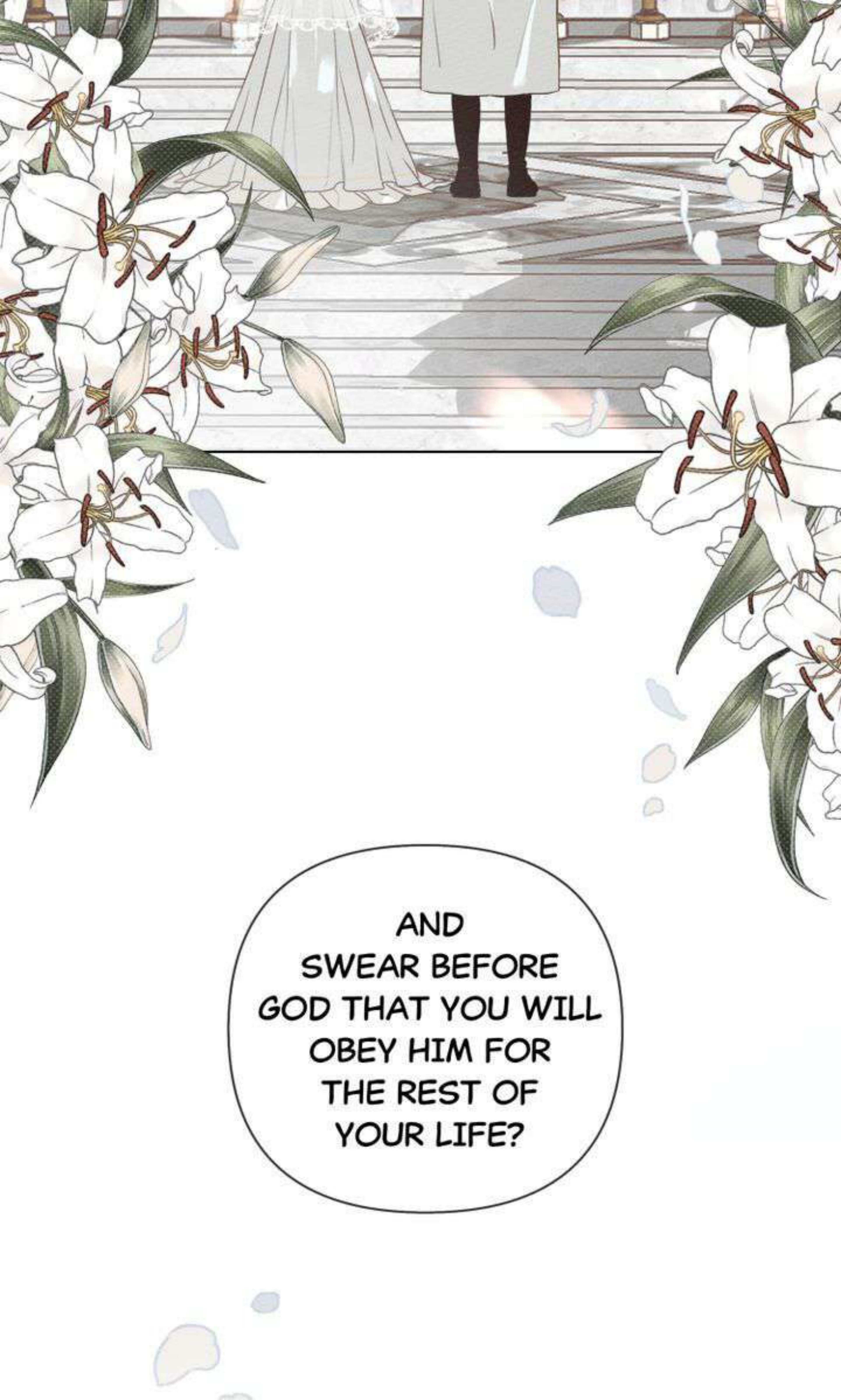
상수리나무 아래
UNDER THE OAK TREE
서말 | P | 원작 김수지
Chapter 1-20

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, I ONCE HAD A DREAM.


I ASK YOU AS A HUMBLE SERVANT OF THE HOLY FATHER, THE
DIVINE REGENT OF GOD –
DO YOU, **MAXIMILIAN CROYSO,** TAKE THIS MAN, **RIFTAN CALYPSE,** AS YOUR LAWFULLY WEDDED HUSBAND,


AND SWEAR BEFORE GOD THAT YOU WILL OBEY HIM FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE?

A FOOLISH DREAM THAT ONE DAY, A KNIGHT WOULD COME TO RESCUE ME.

...I DO.
DING-

DING-

DING-

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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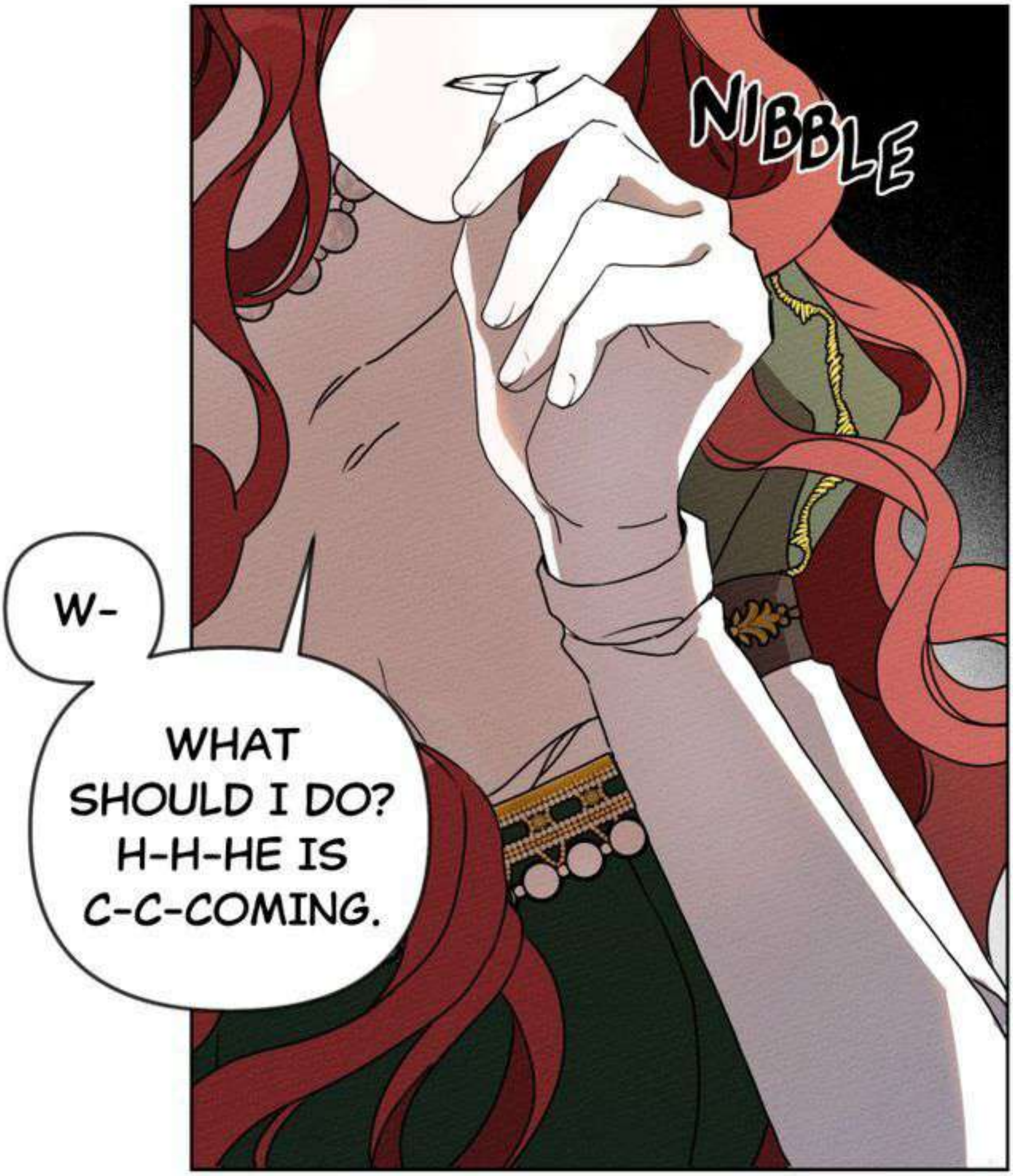
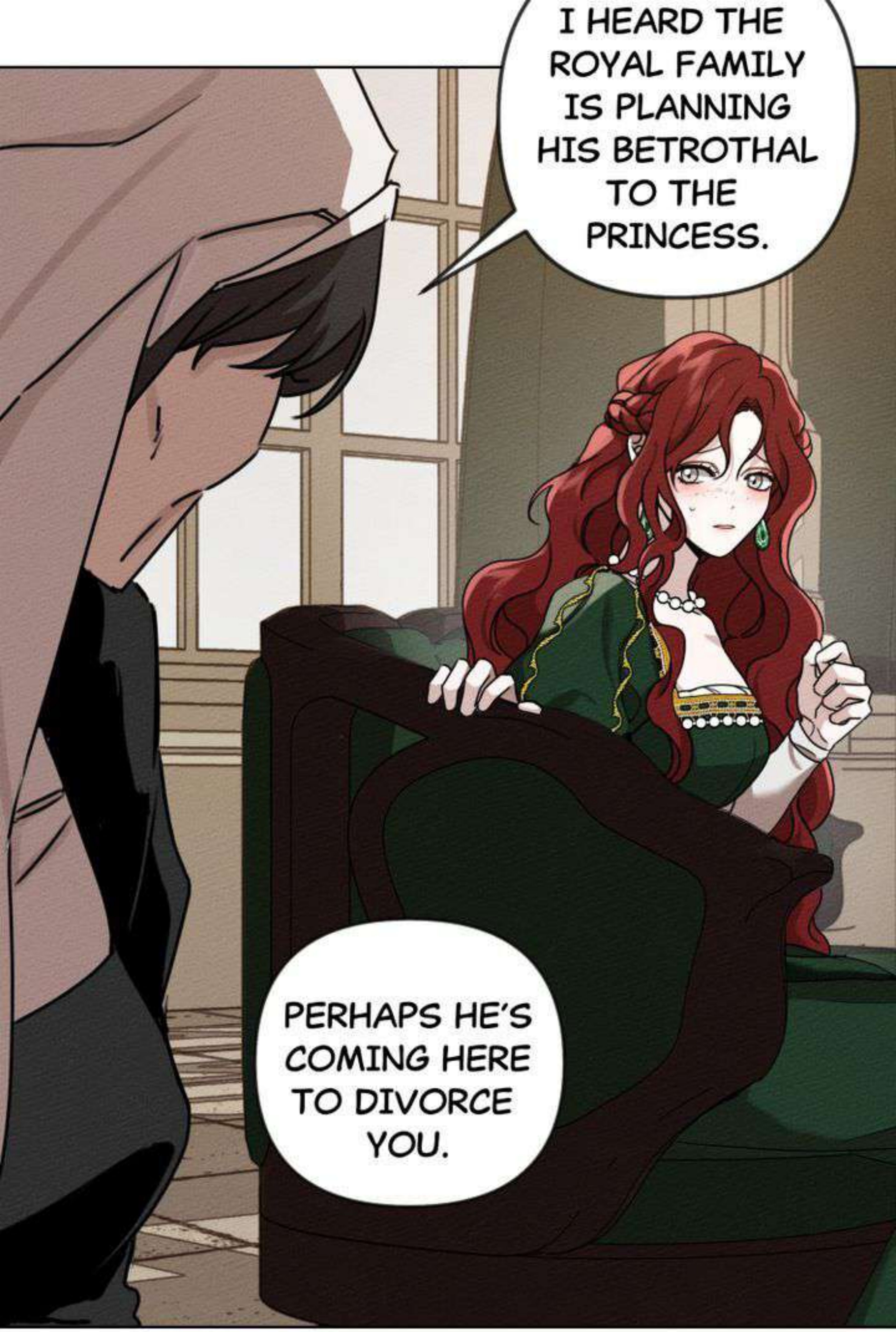
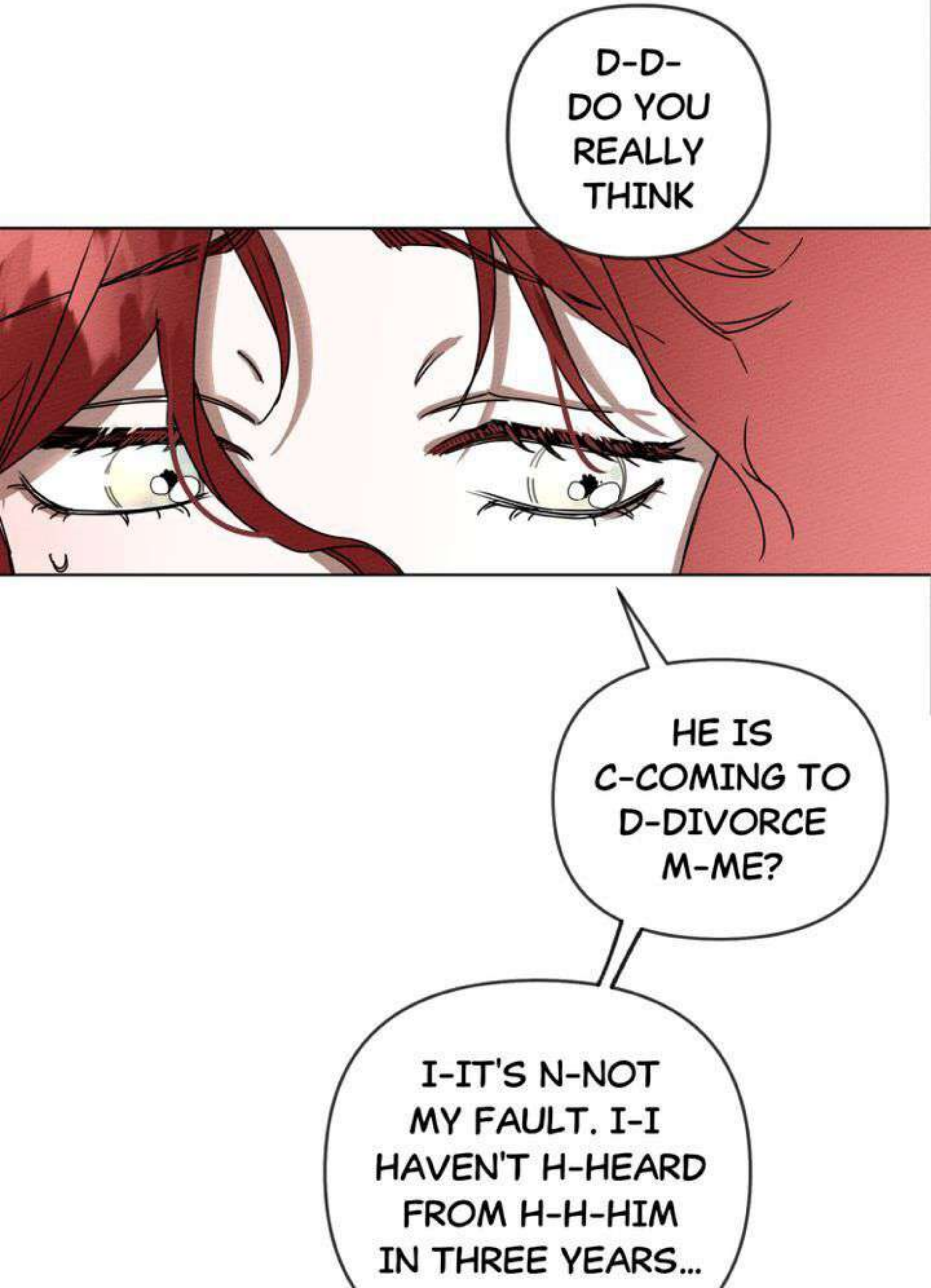
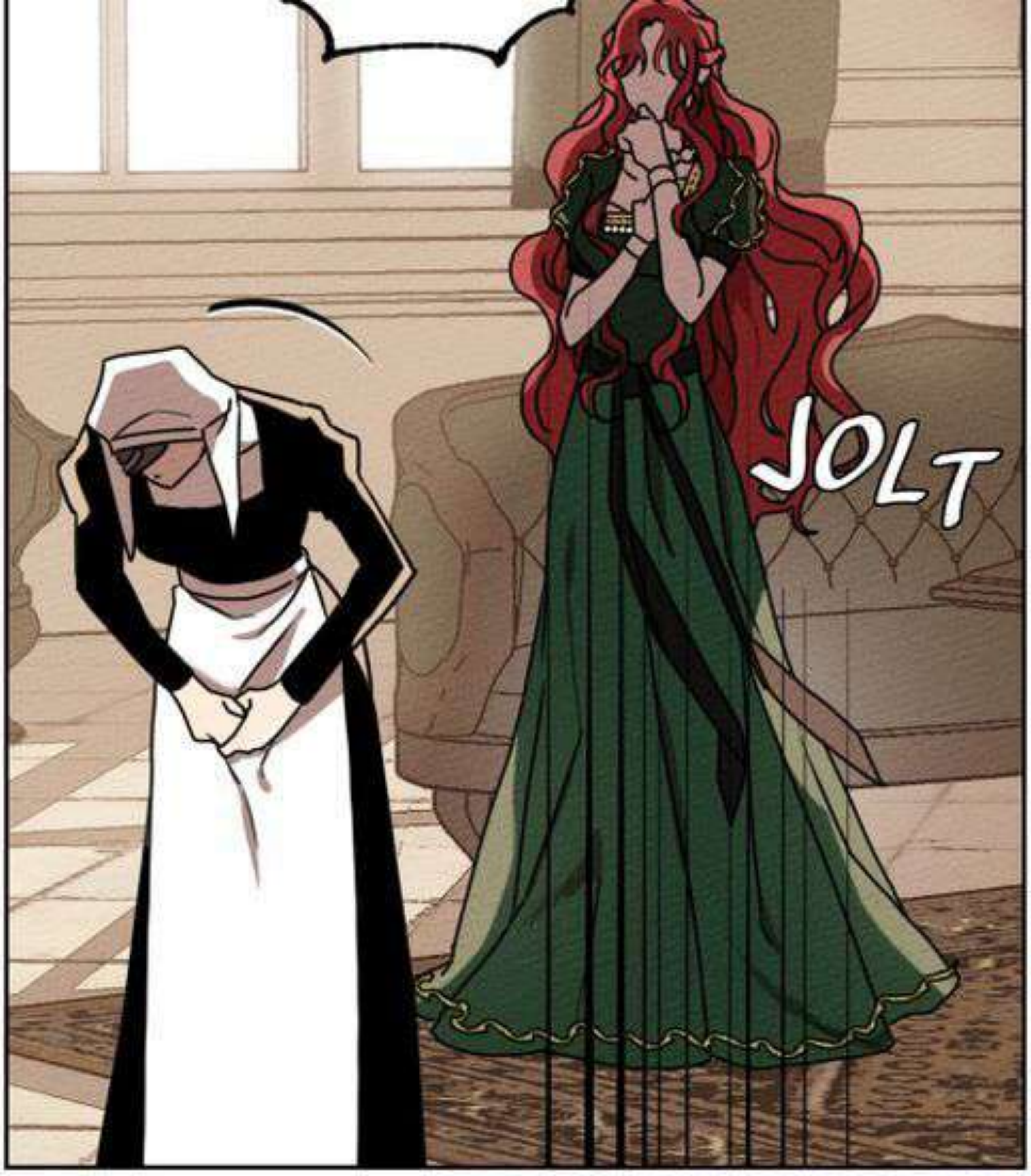

NIBBLE
W-
WHAT SHOULD I DO? H-H-HE IS C-C-COMING.


I HEARD THE ROYAL FAMILY IS PLANNING HIS BETROTHAL TO THE PRINCESS.
PERHAPS HE'S COMING HERE TO DIVORCE YOU.


D-D-
DO YOU
REALLY
THINK
HE IS
C-COMING TO
D-DIVORCE
M-ME?
I-IT'S N-NOT
MY FAULT. I-I
HAVEN'T H-HEARD
FROM H-H-HIM
IN THREE YEARS...

BANG

AHEM!



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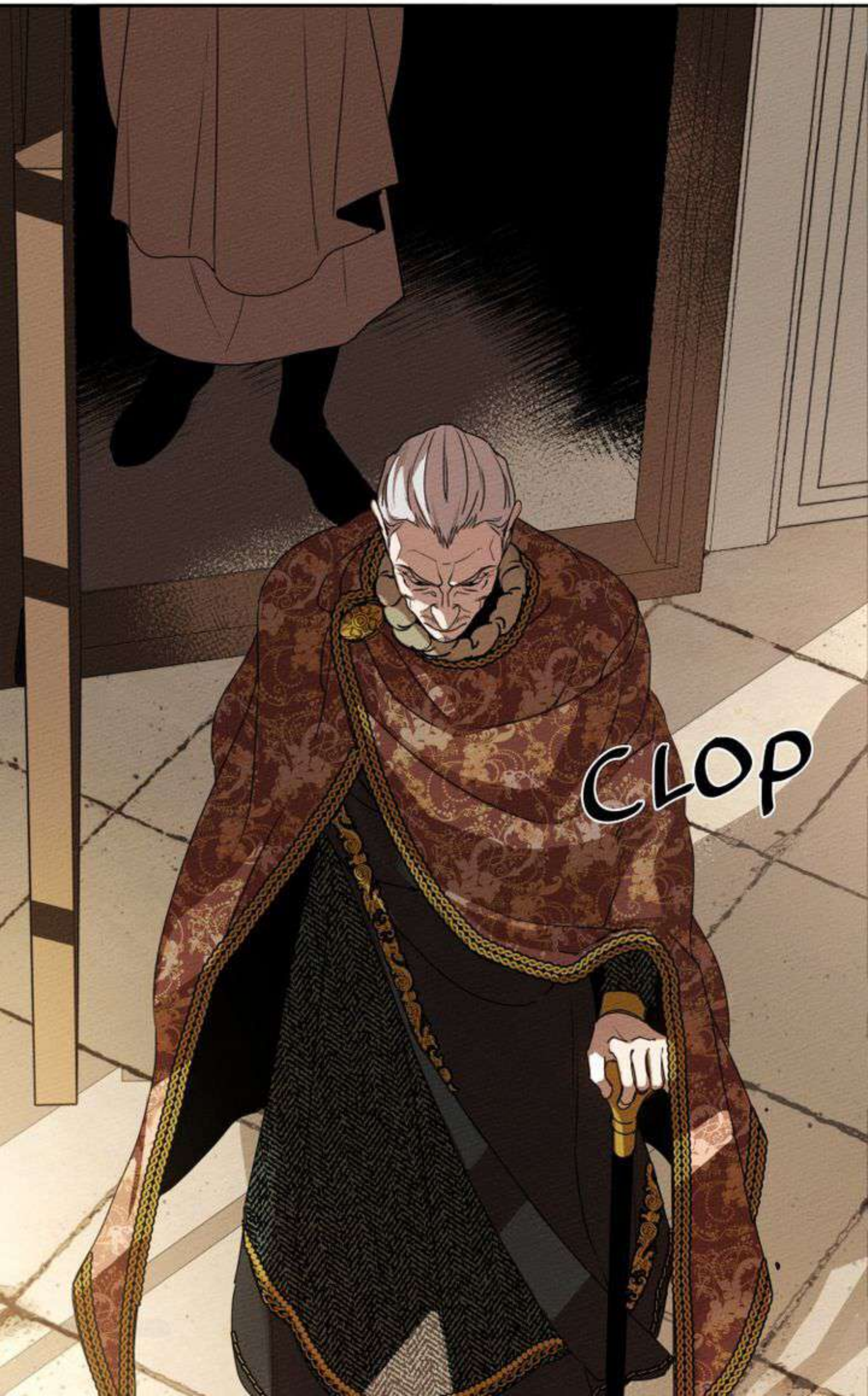
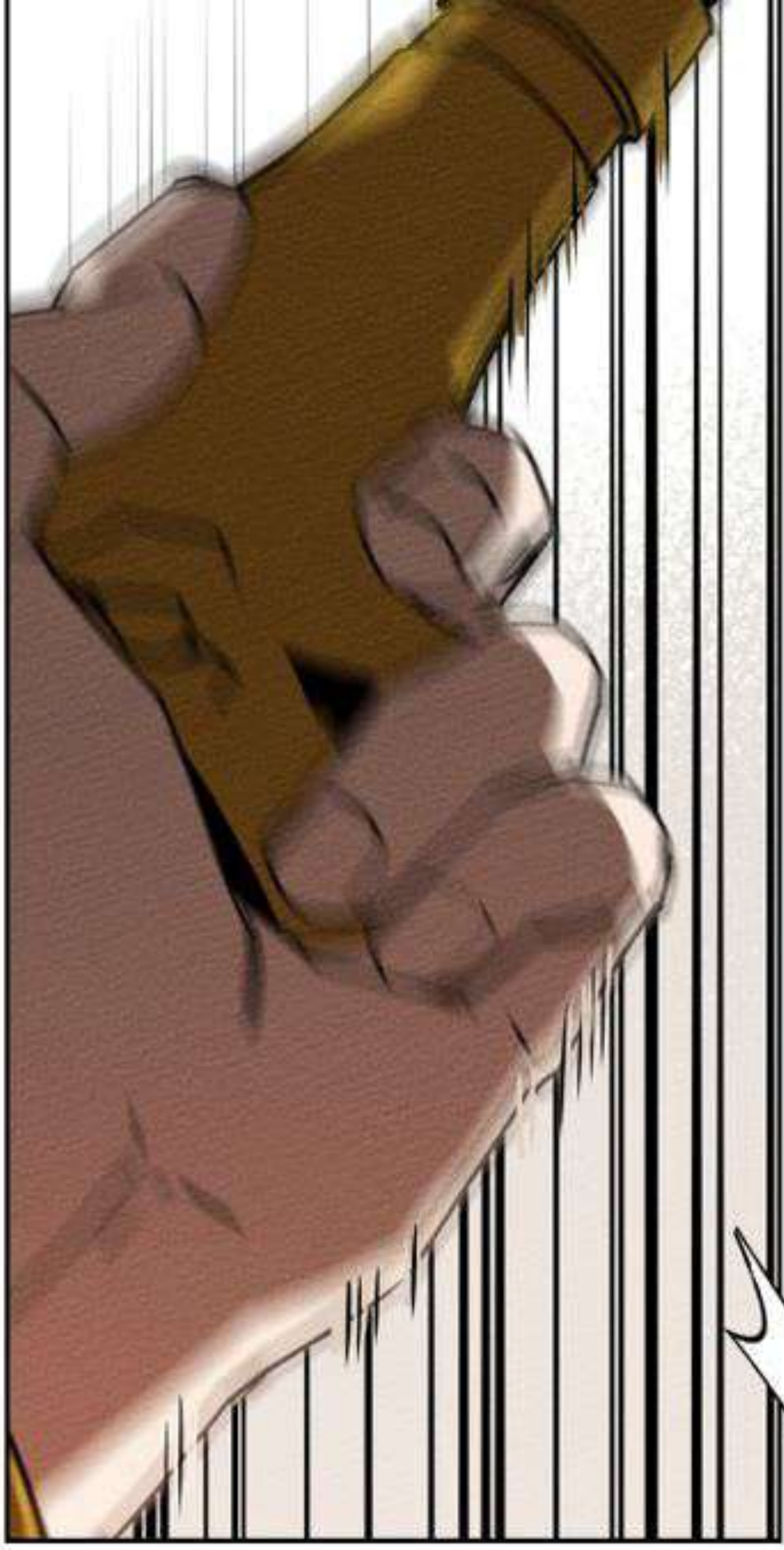
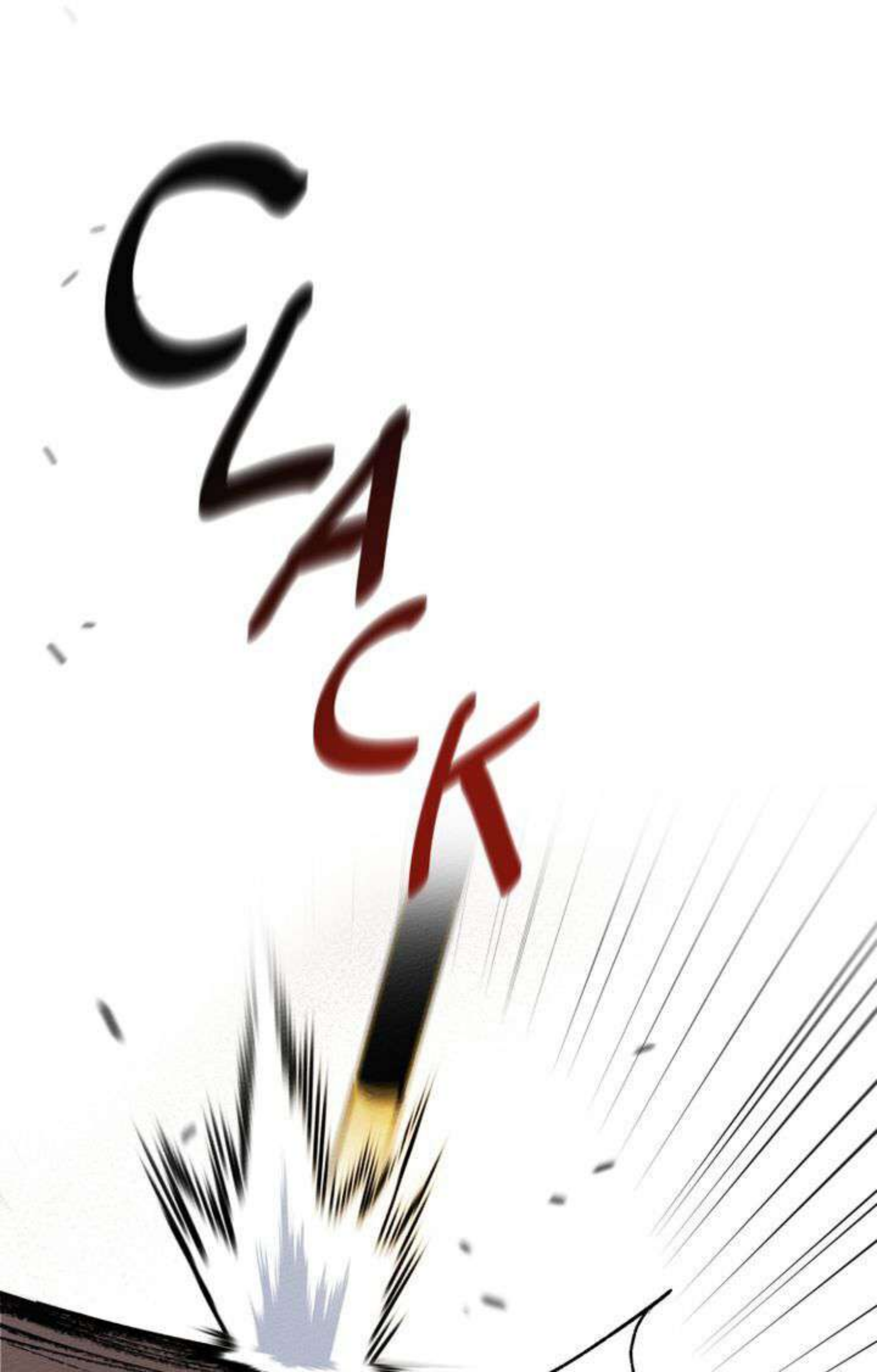

CLOP

CLOP

WHOO


SH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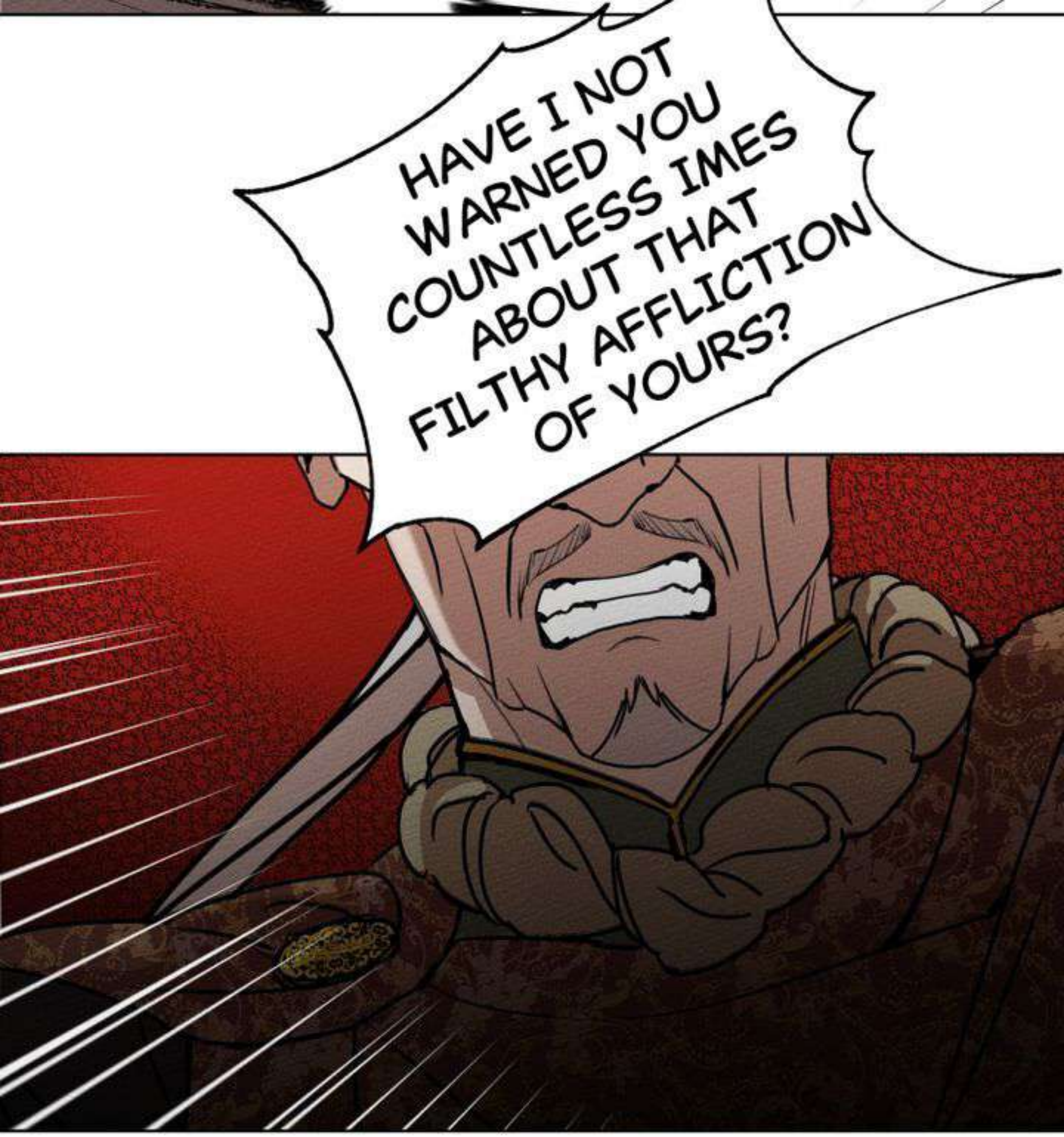
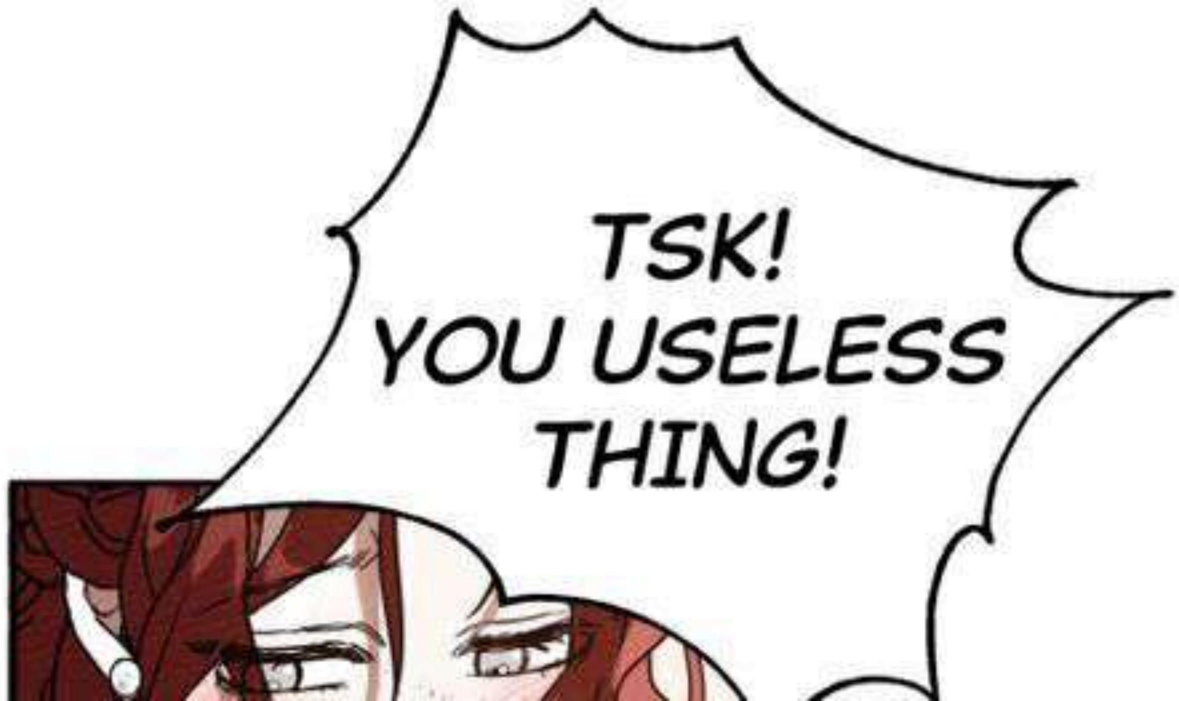
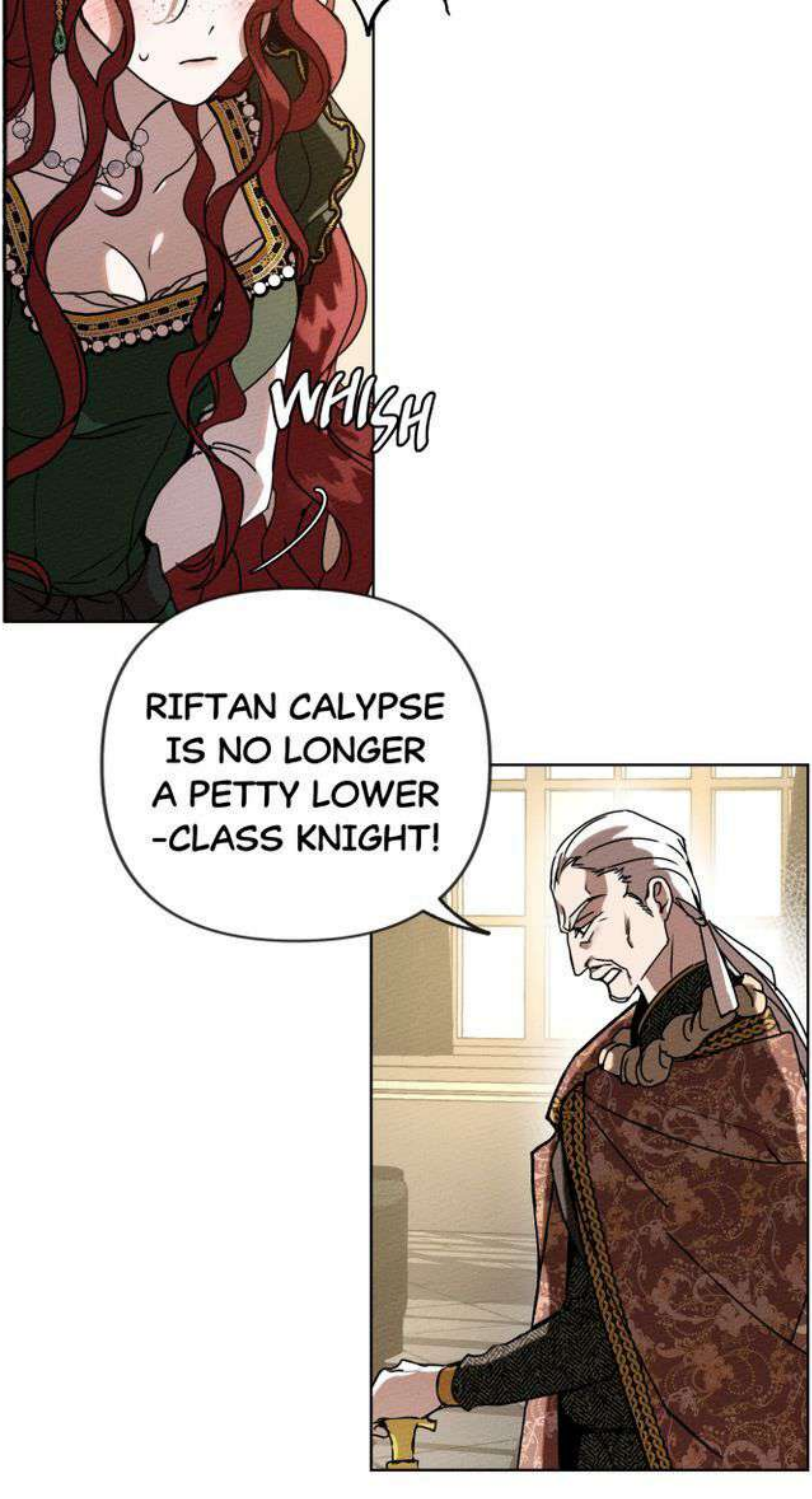
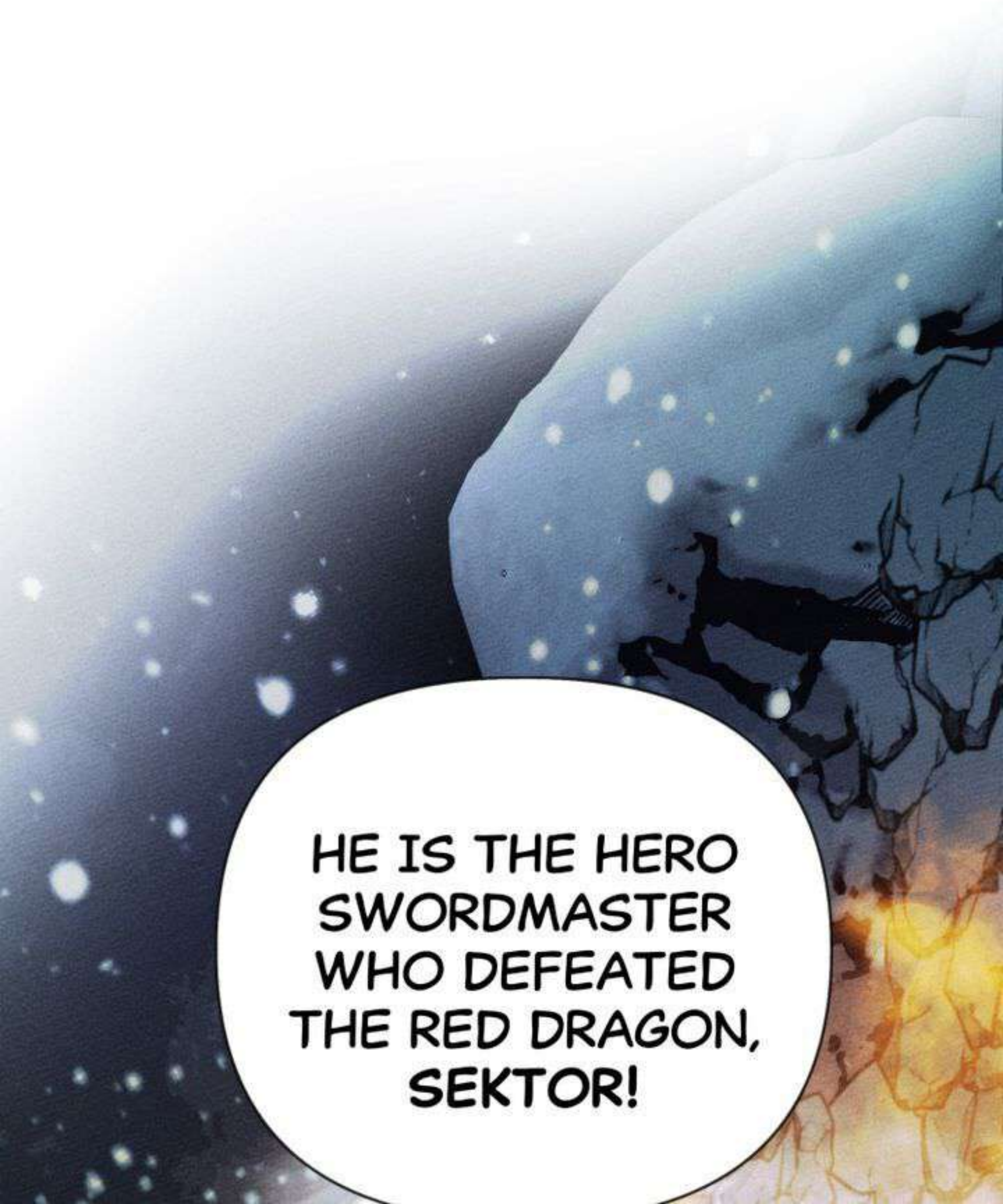
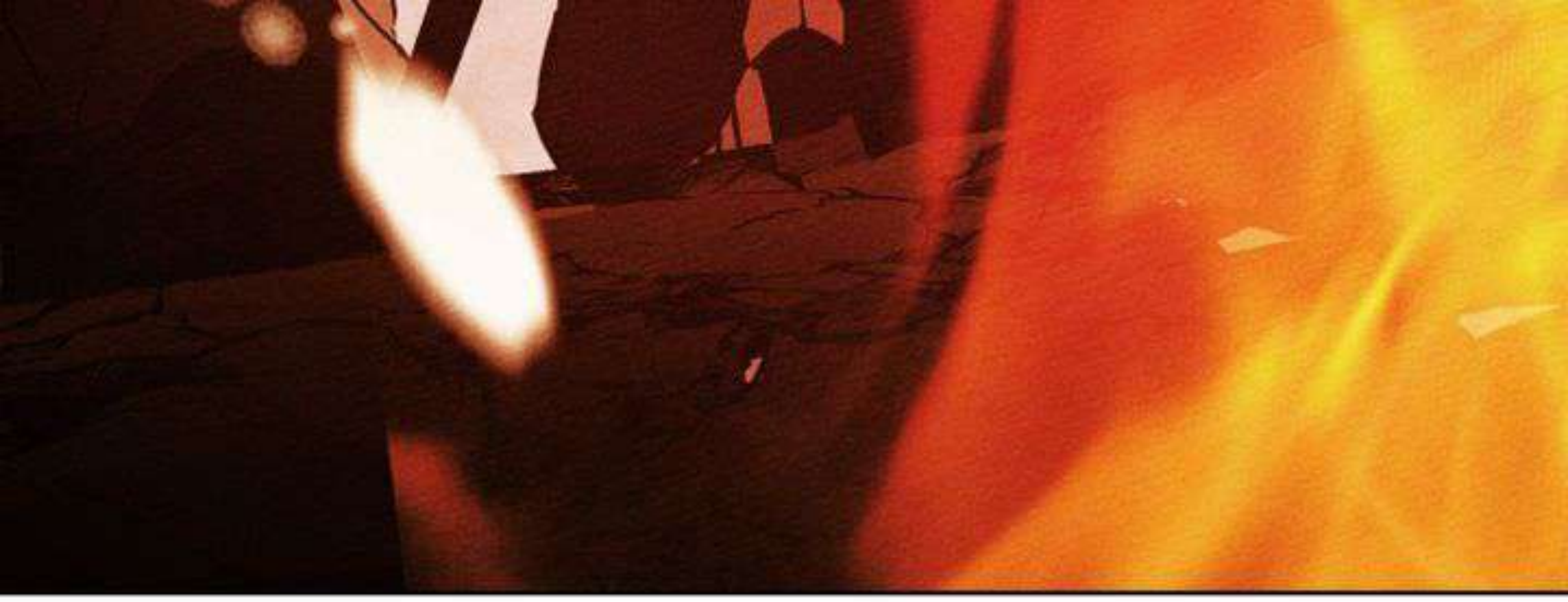
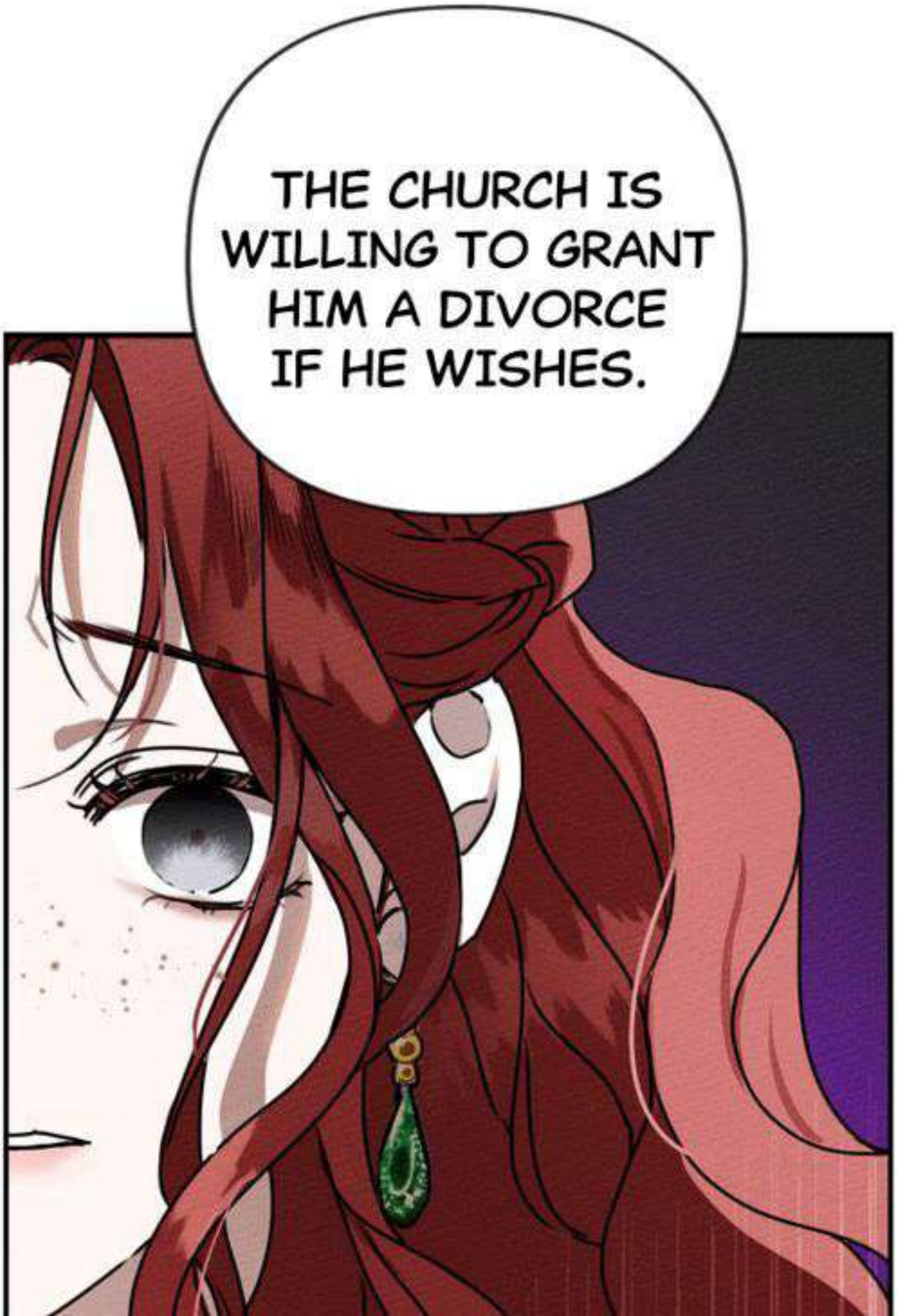

HAVE I NOT WARNED YOU COUNTLESS IMES ABOUT THAT FILTHY AFFLICTION OF YOURS?


TSK! YOU USELESS THING!

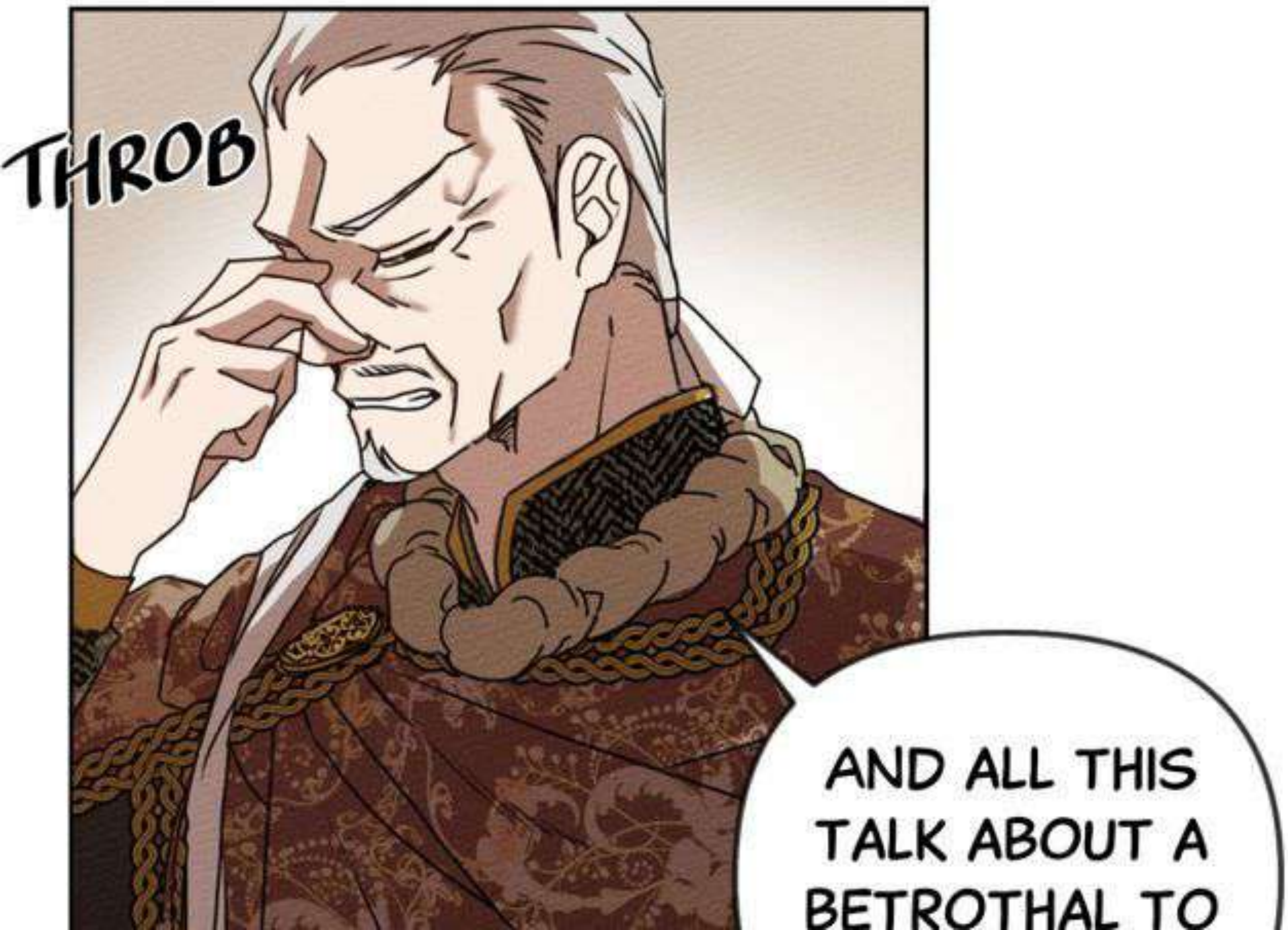

WHISH
RIFTAN CALYPSE IS NO LONGER A PETTY LOWER-CLASS KNIGHT!


HE IS THE HERO SWORDMASTER WHO DEFEATED THE RED DRAGON, SEKTOR!

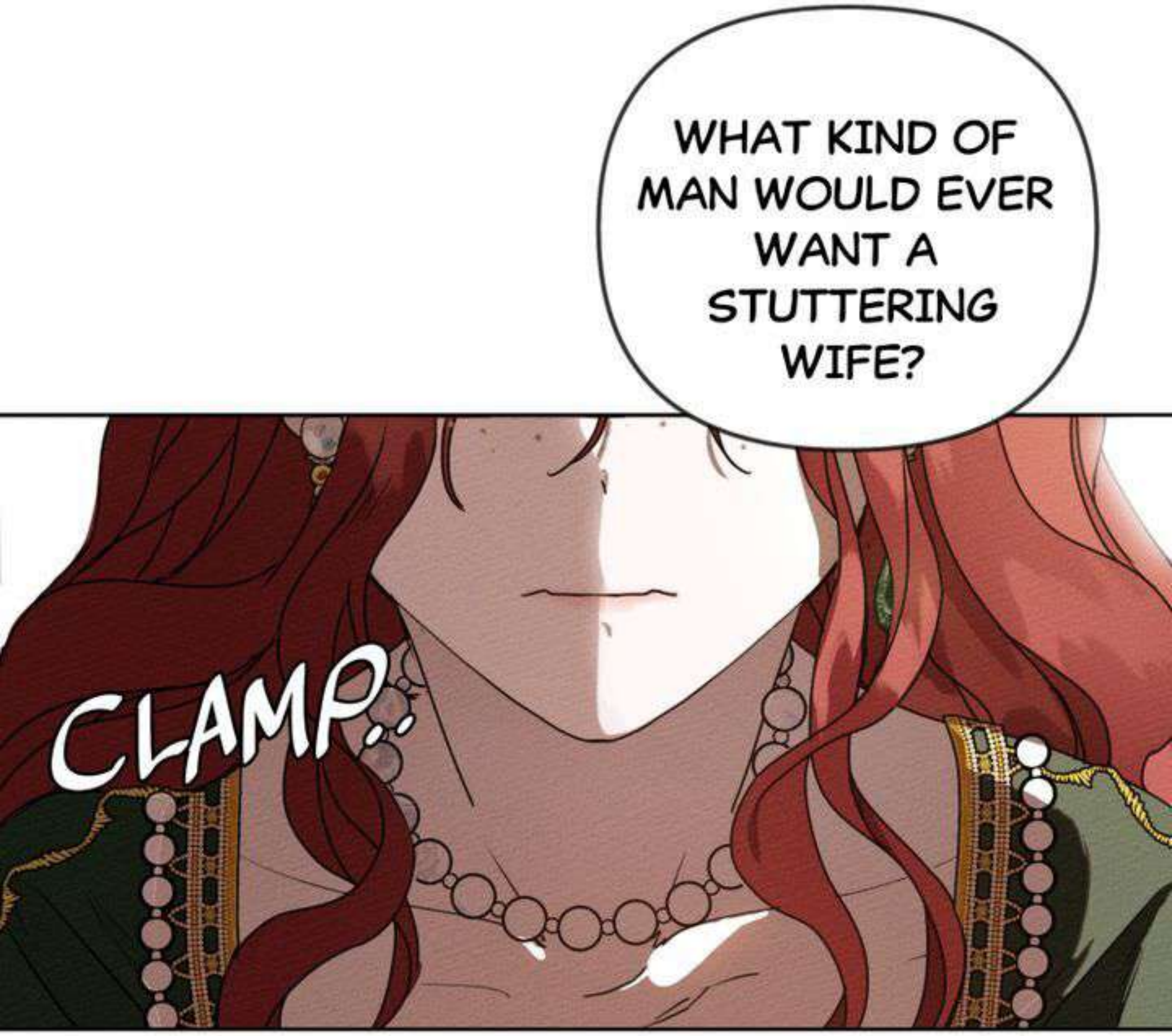


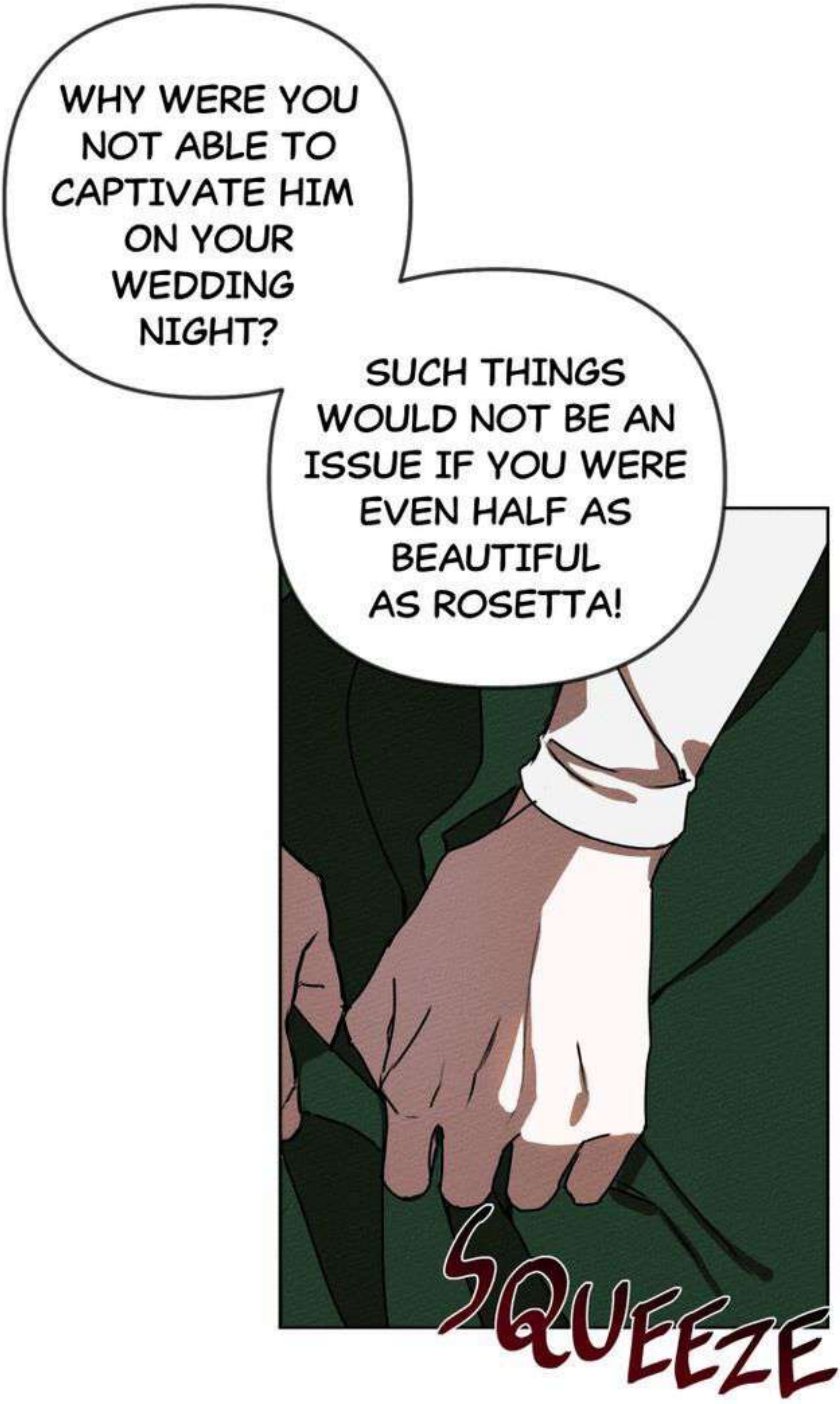

THE CHURCH IS WILLING TO GRANT HIM A DIVORCE IF HE WISHES.

THUMP

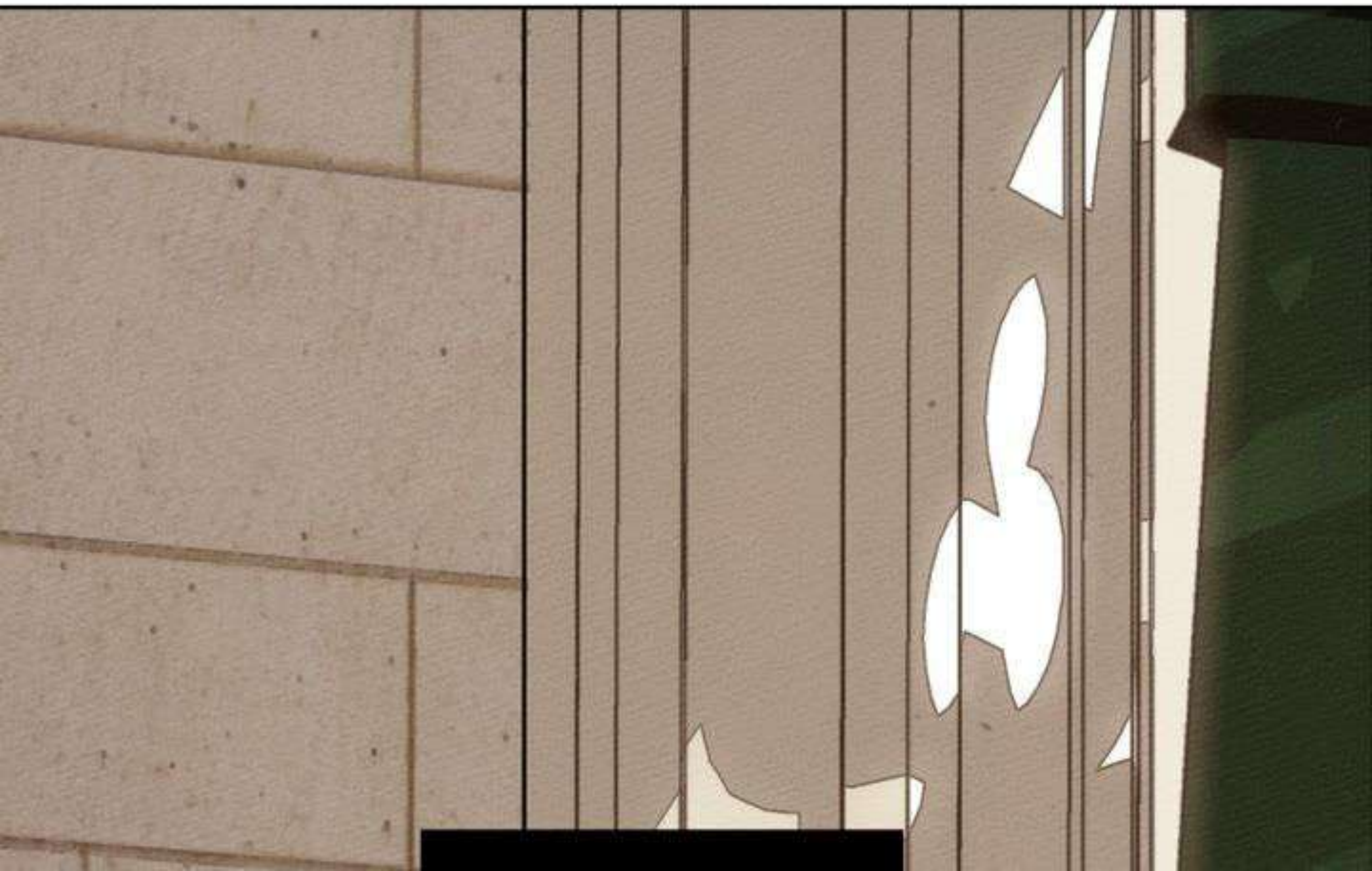

THROB
AND ALL THIS TALK ABOUT A BETROTHAL TO

THE PRINCESS!


WHAT KIND OF MAN WOULD EVER WANT A STUTTERING WIFE?
CLAMP..


WHY WERE YOU NOT ABLE TO CAPTIVATE HIM ON YOUR WEDDING NIGHT?
SUCH THINGS WOULD NOT BE AN ISSUE IF YOU WERE EVEN HALF AS BEAUTIFUL AS ROSETTA!
SQUEEZE

AND IF YOU WERE AT LEAST NORMAL...! THEN I WOULD NOT HAVE HAD TO CRAWL AT HIS FEET.



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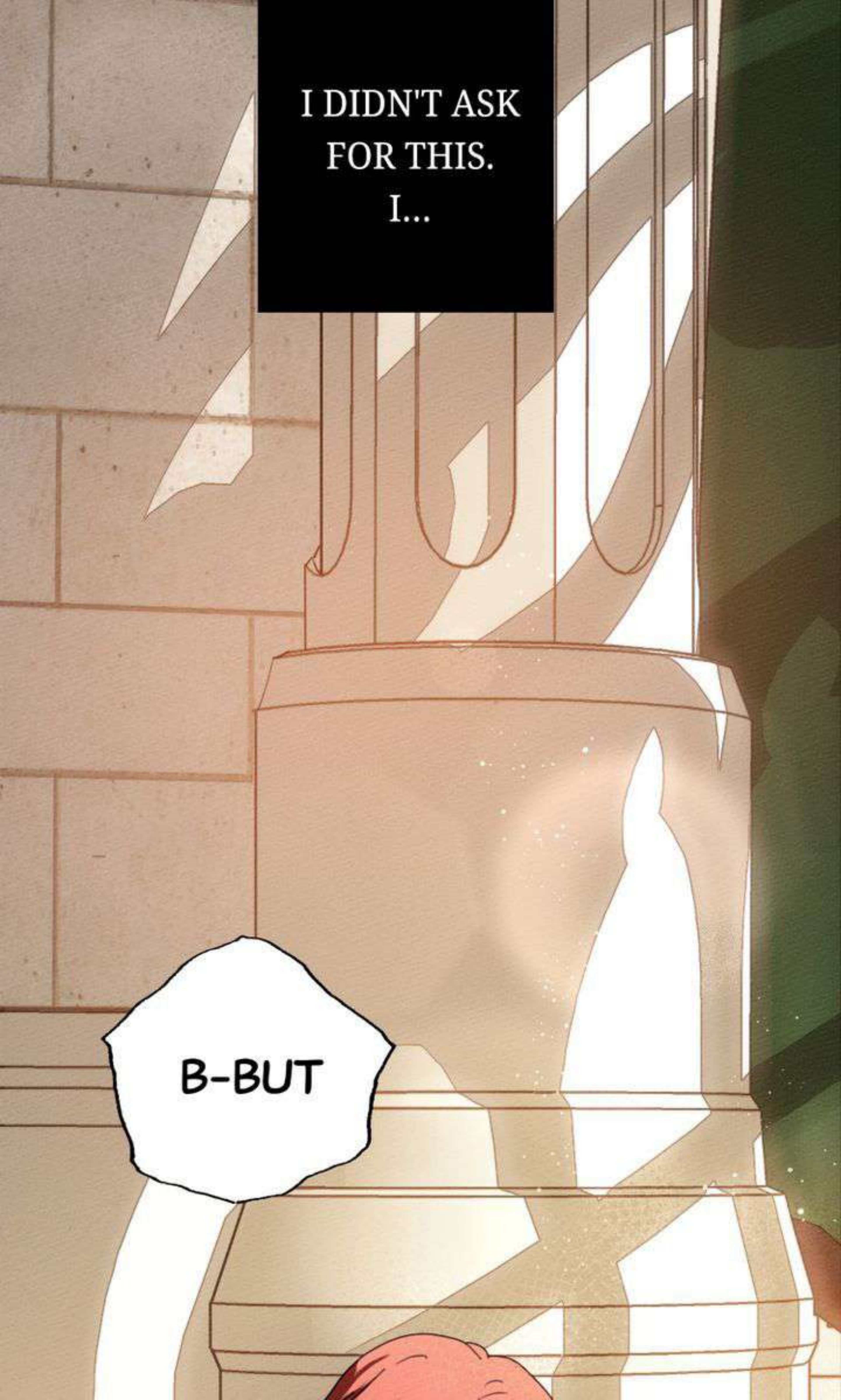
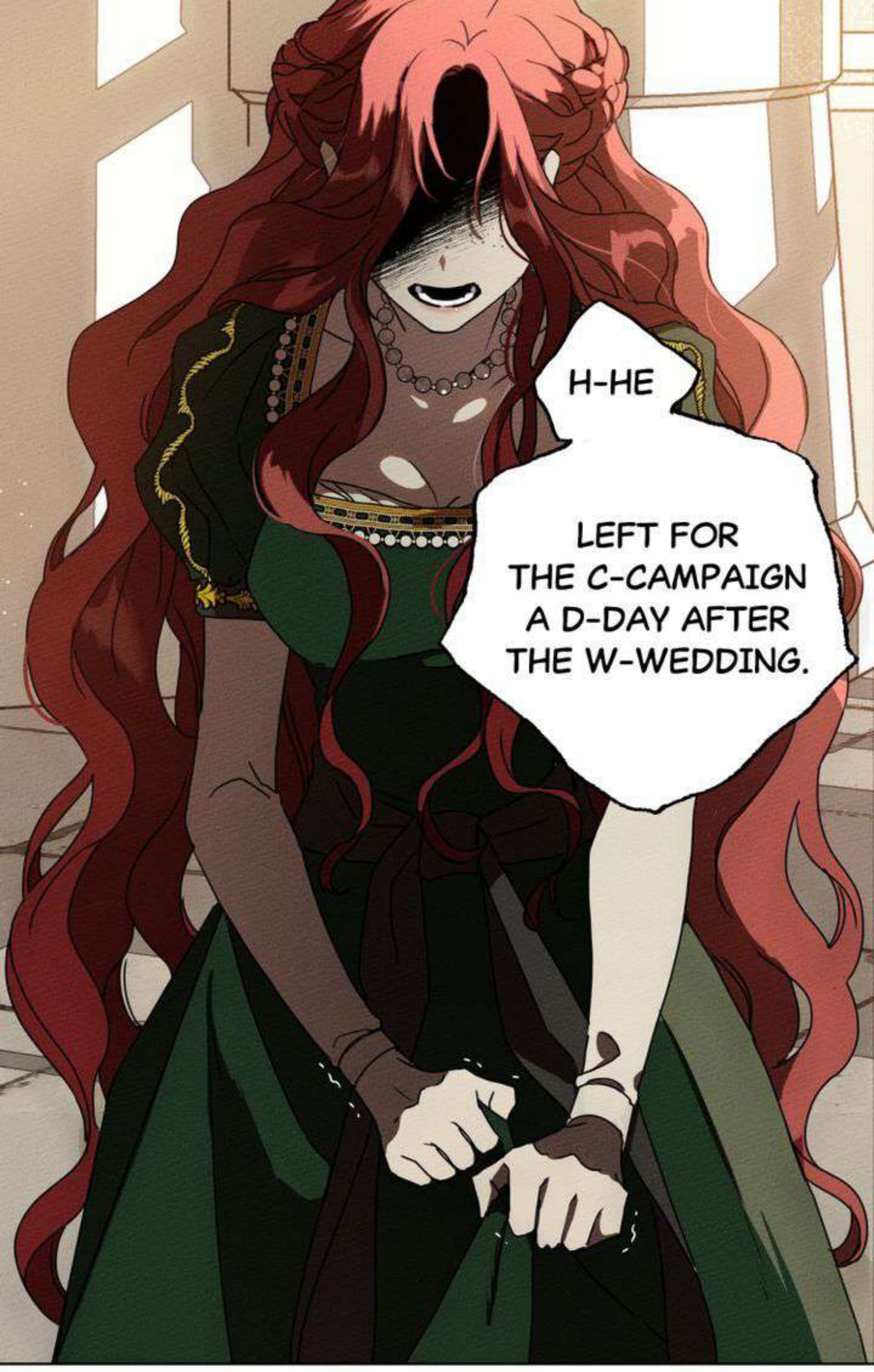
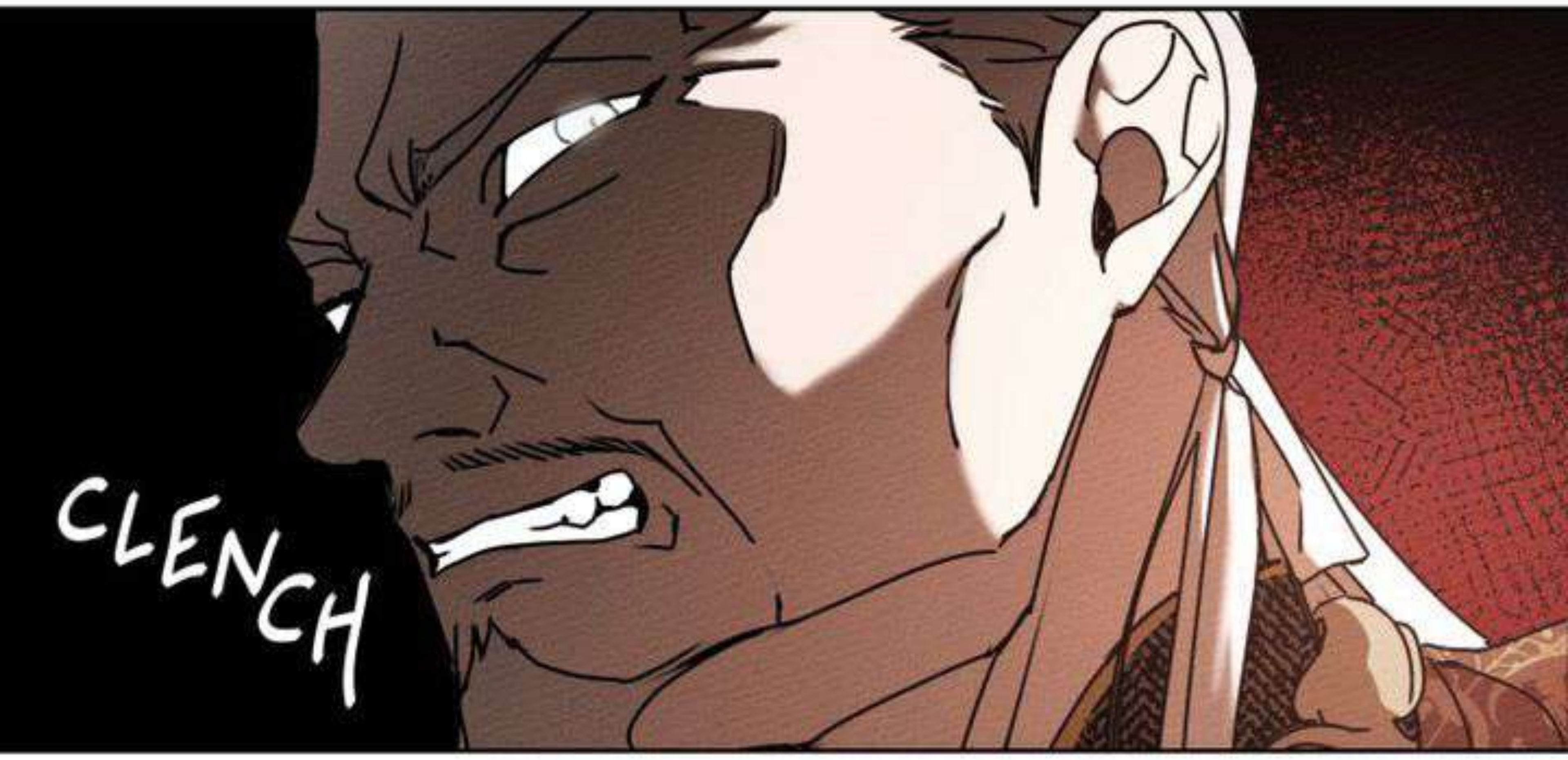
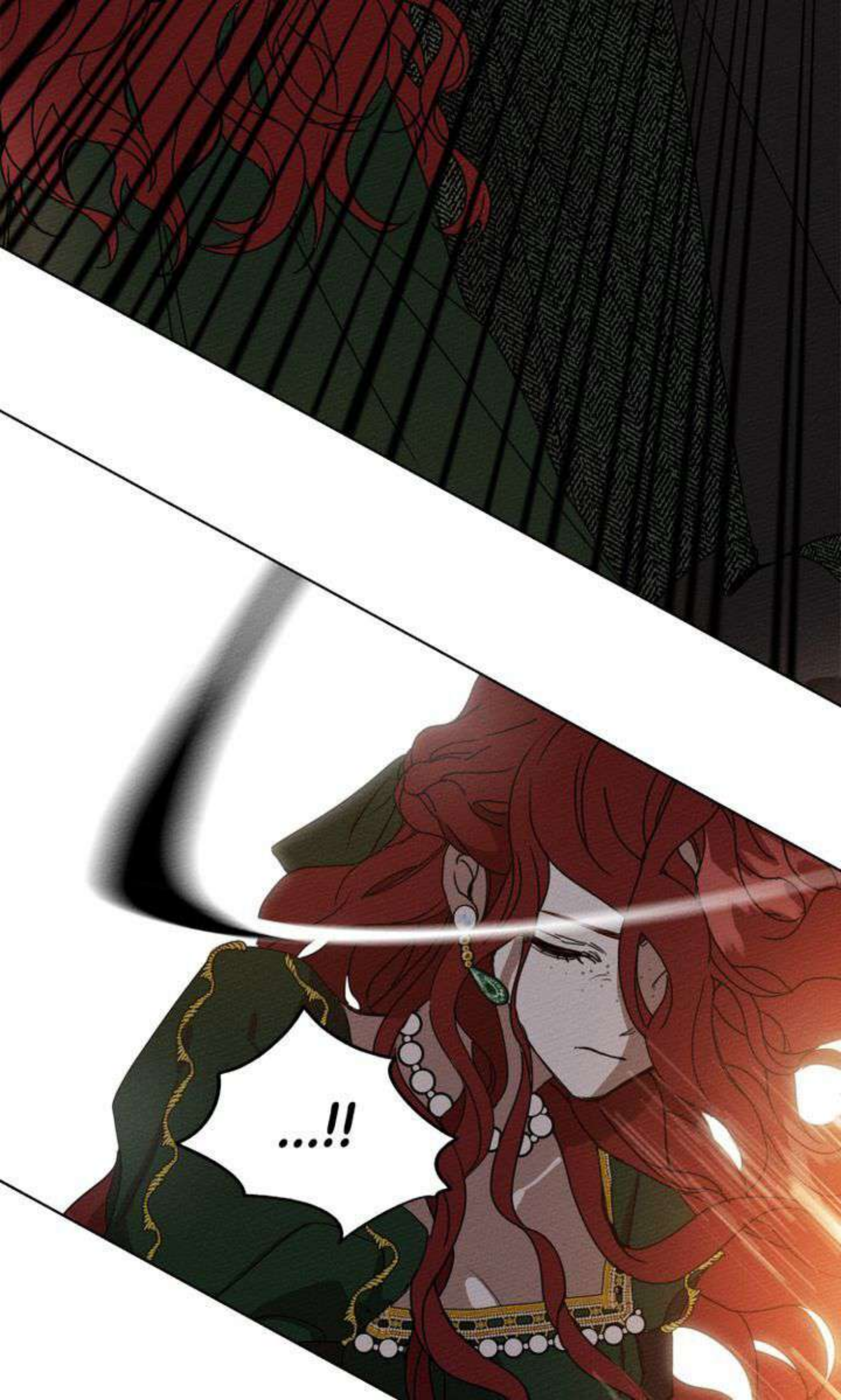

I DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS.
I...
B-BUT

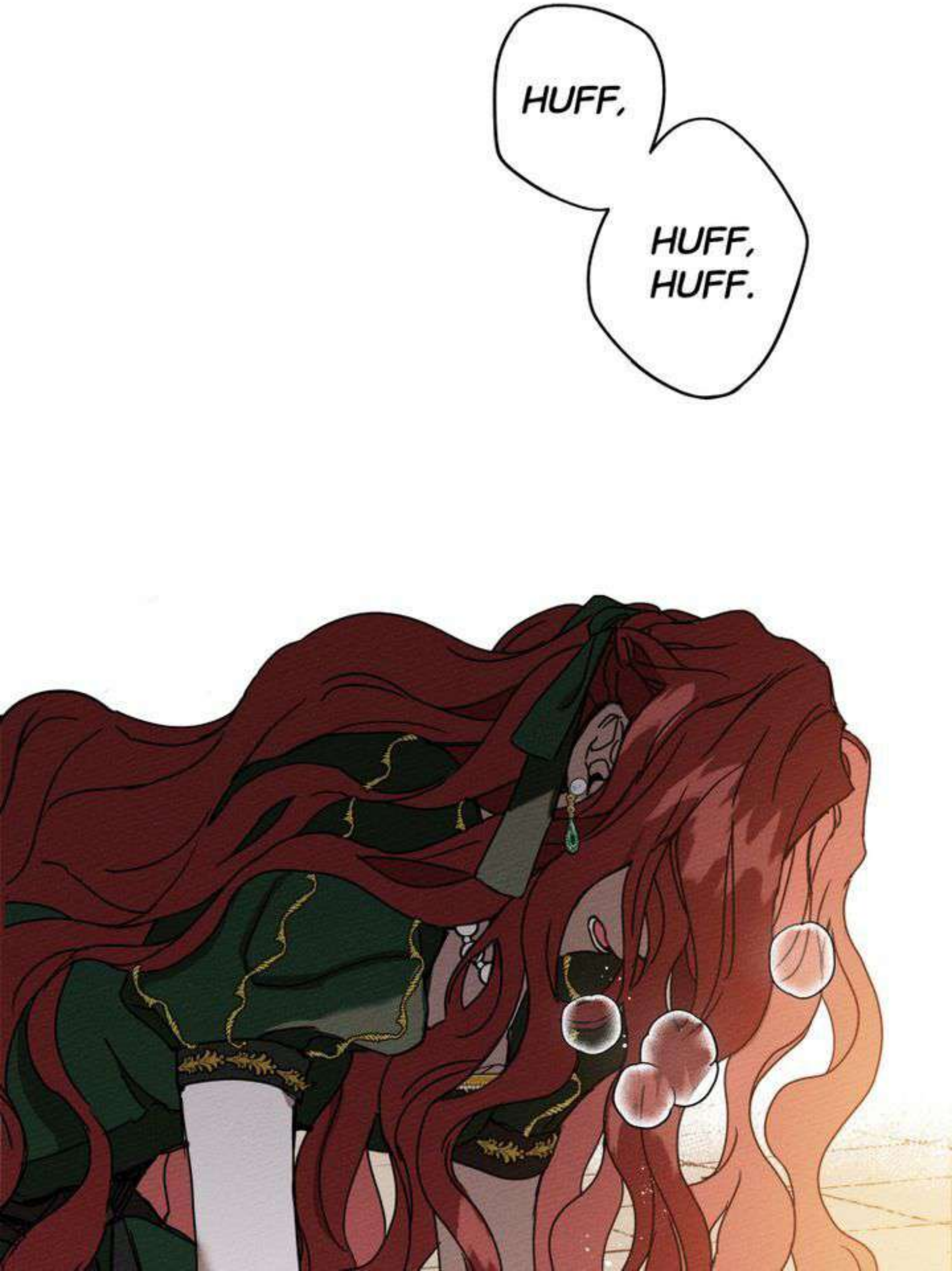

H-HE
LEFT FOR THE C-CAMPAIGN A D-DAY AFTER THE W-WEDDING.

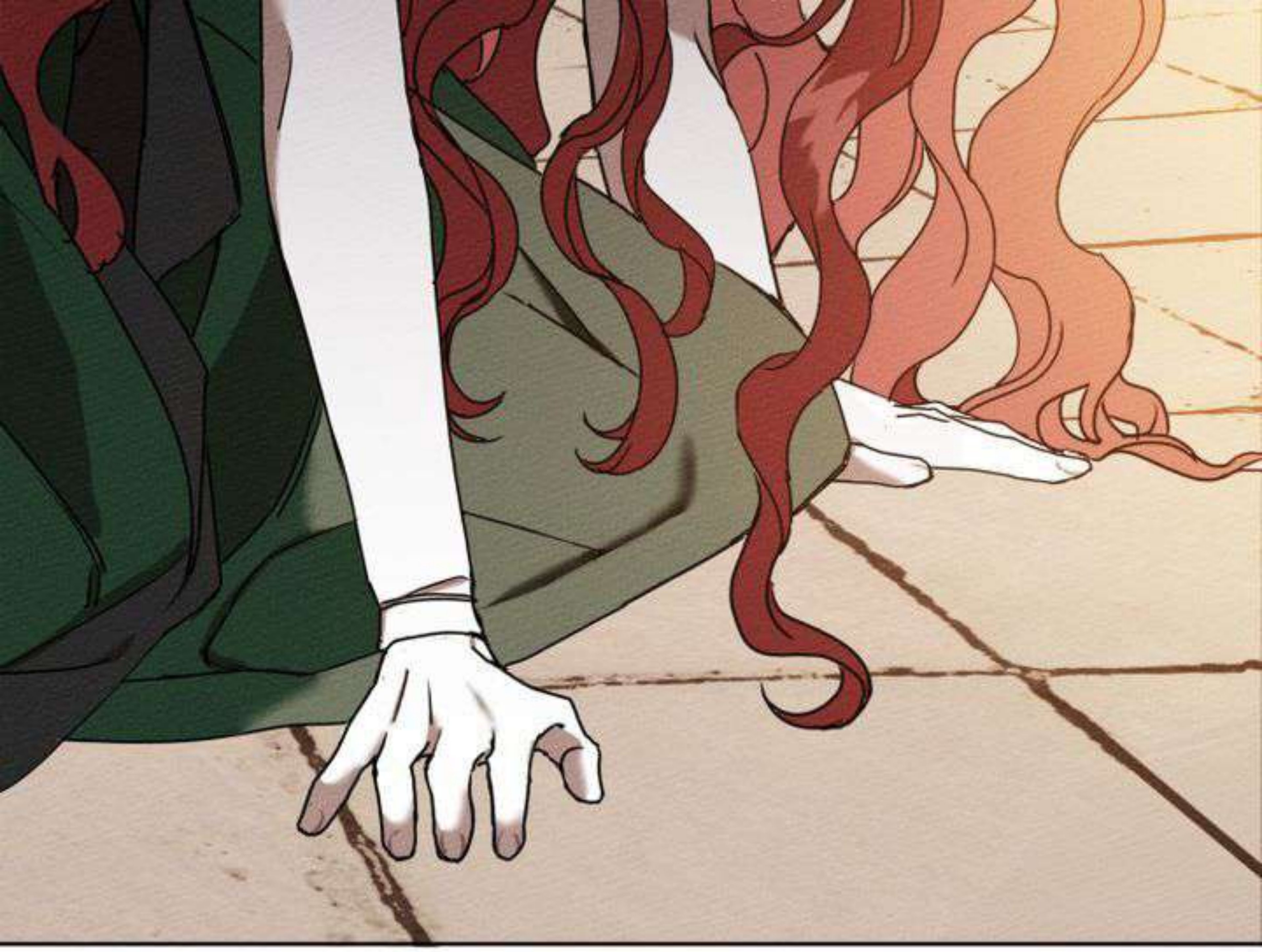

CLENCH

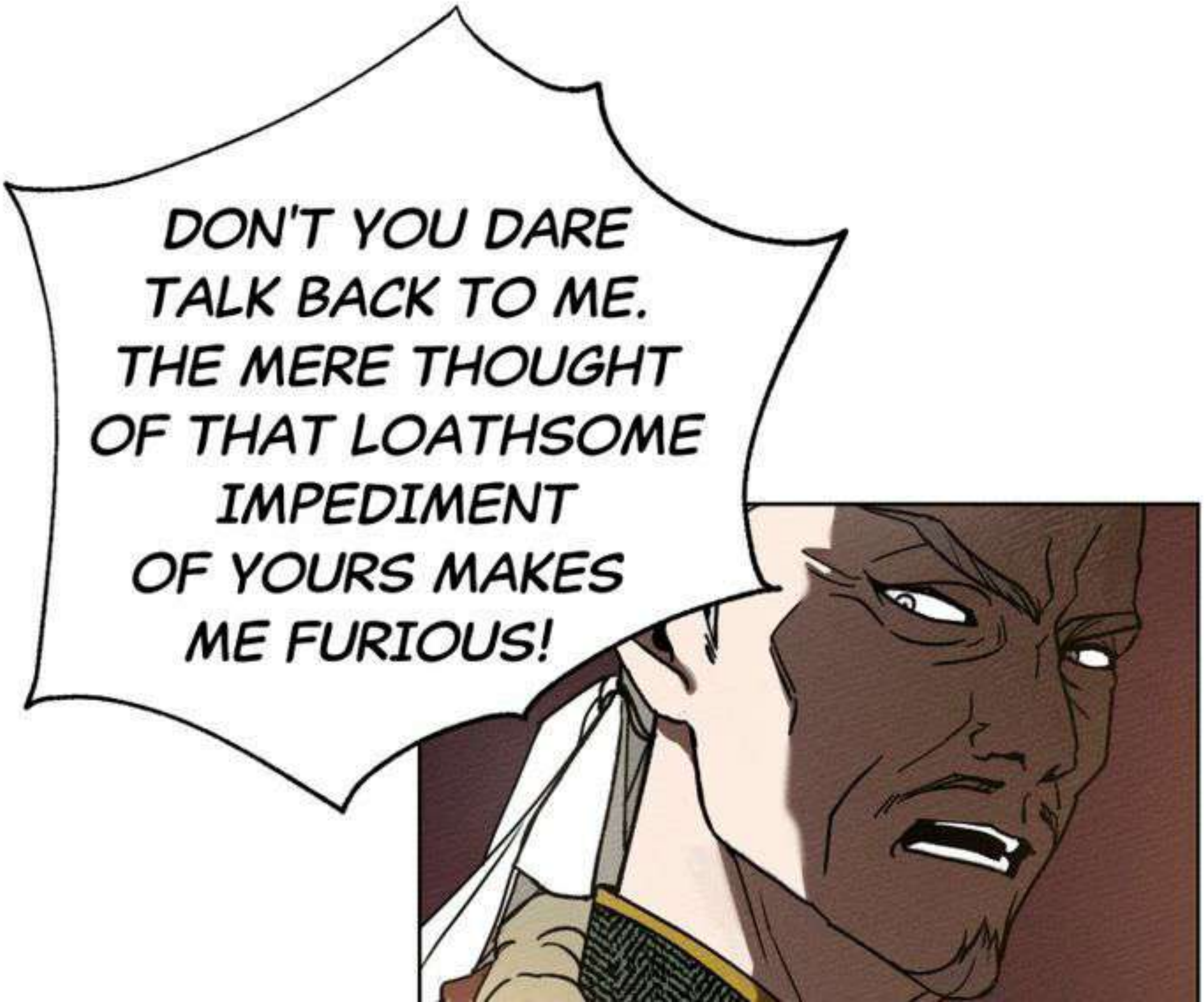
WHOOSH

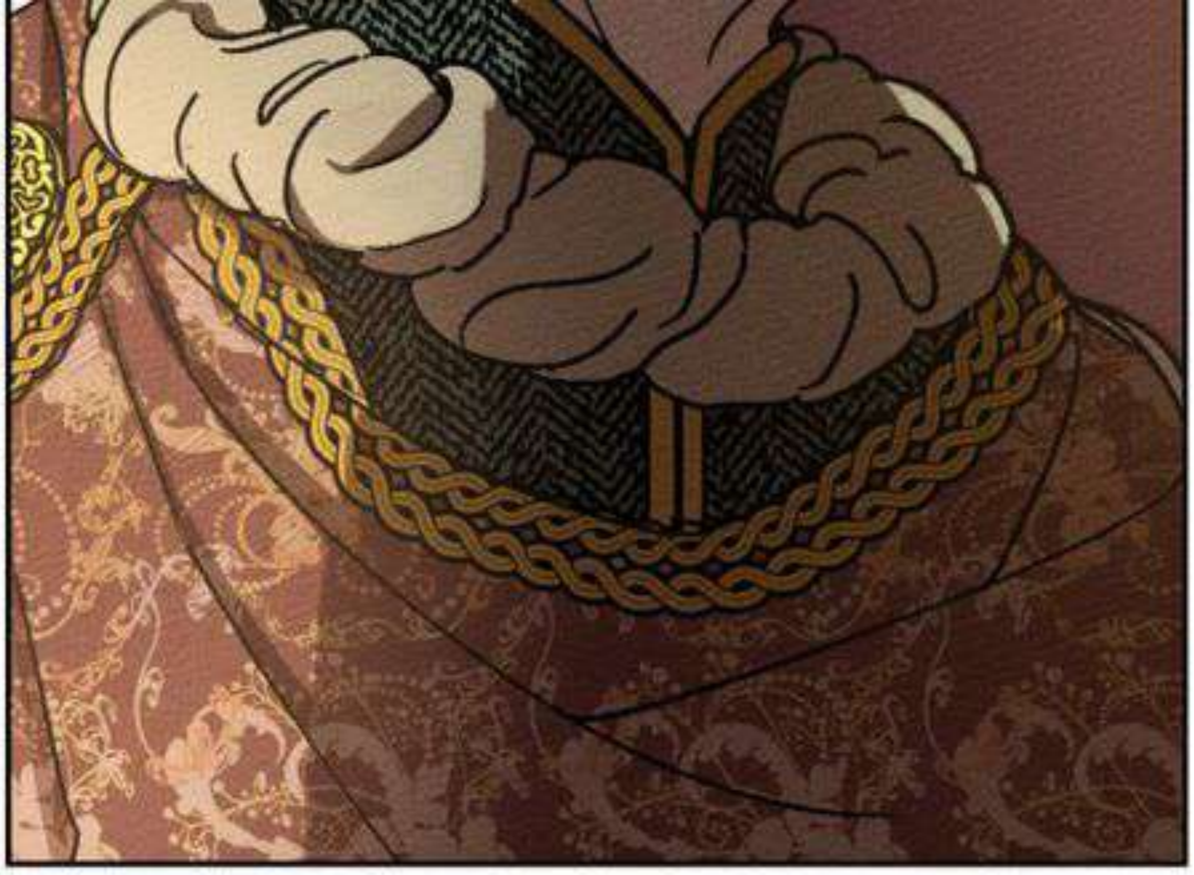


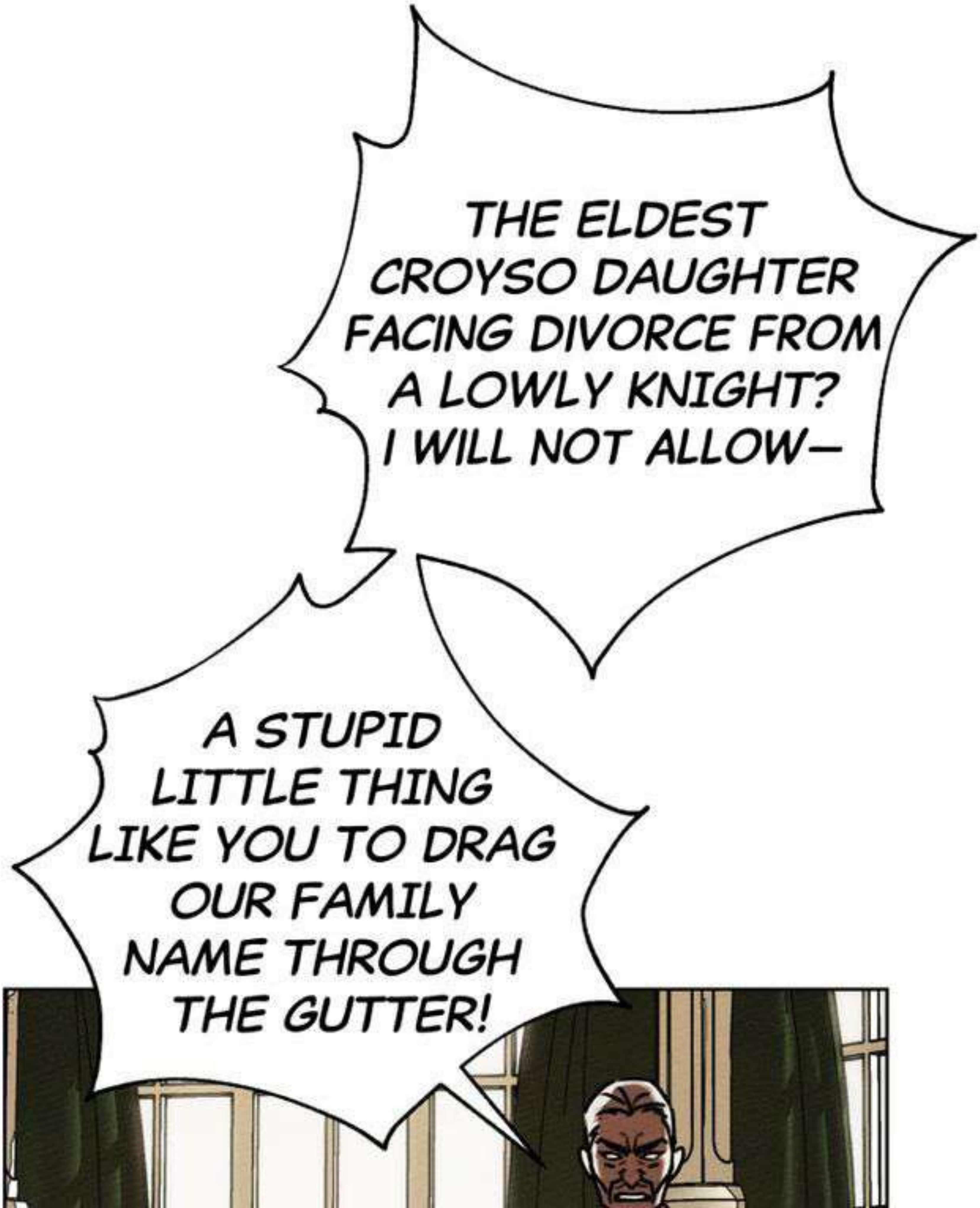
WHACK

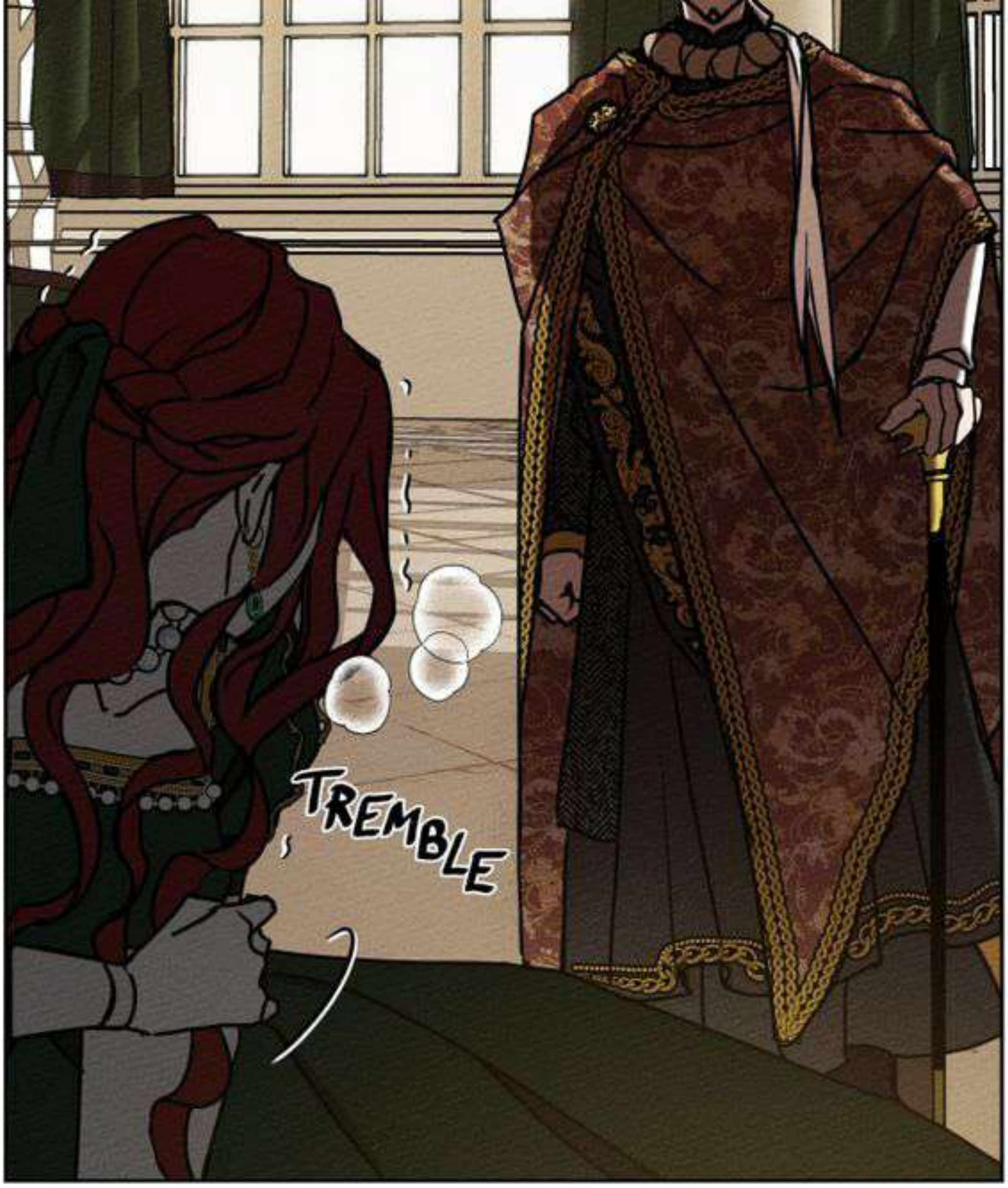

HUFF,
HUFF,
HUFF.



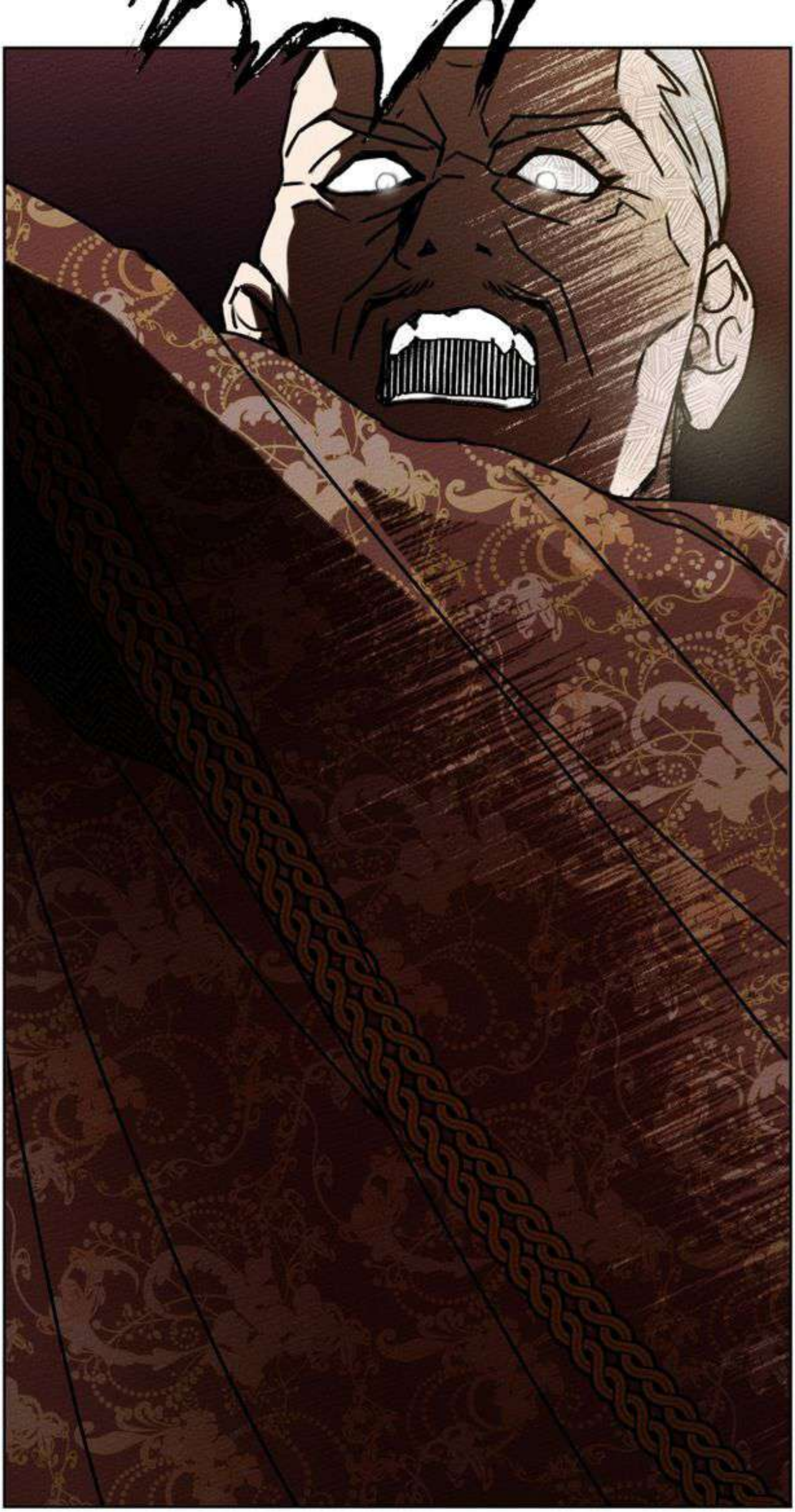

DON'T YOU DARE TALK BACK TO ME. THE MERE THOUGHT OF THAT LOATHSOME IMPEDIMENT OF YOURS MAKES ME FURIOUS!

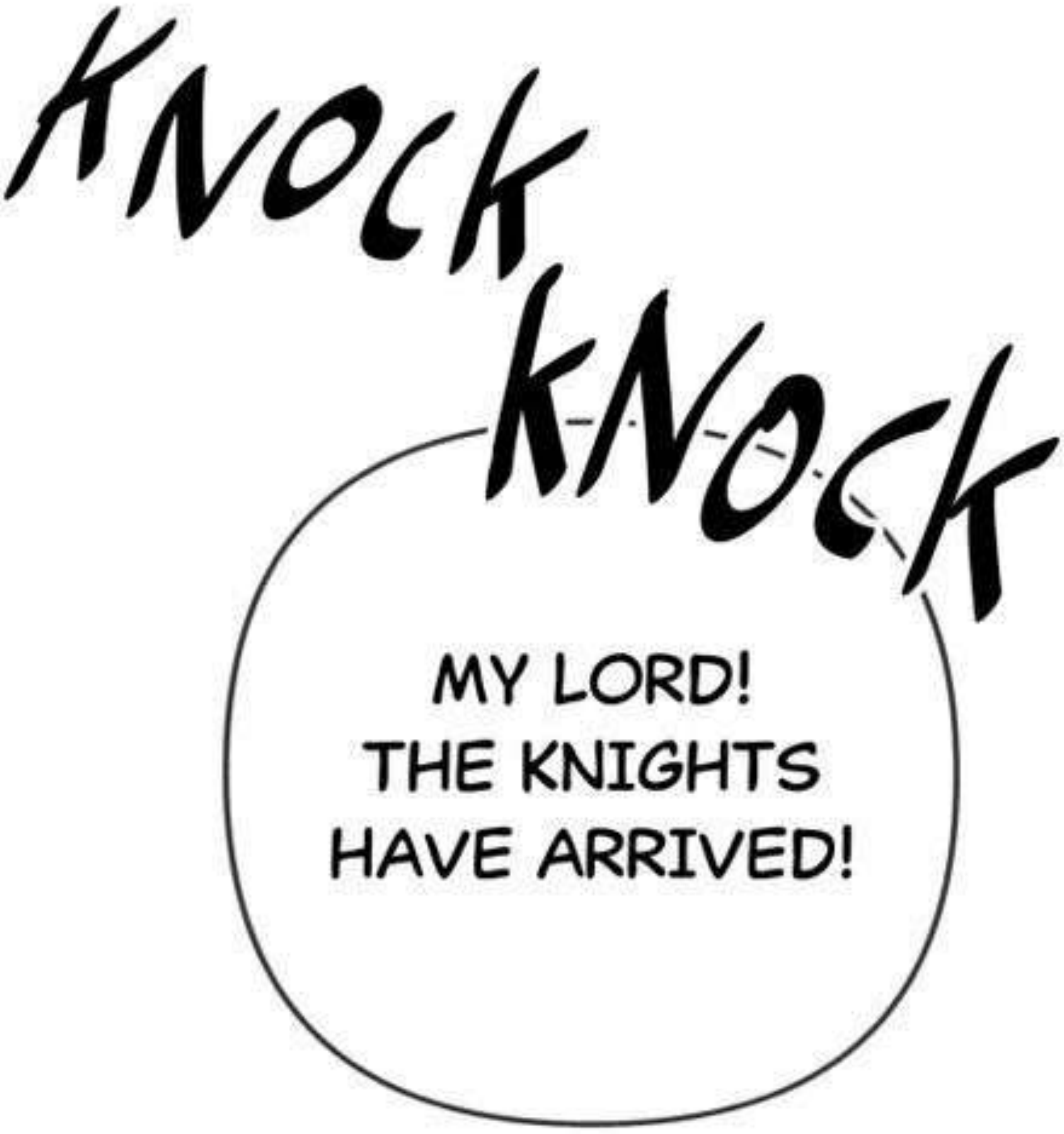


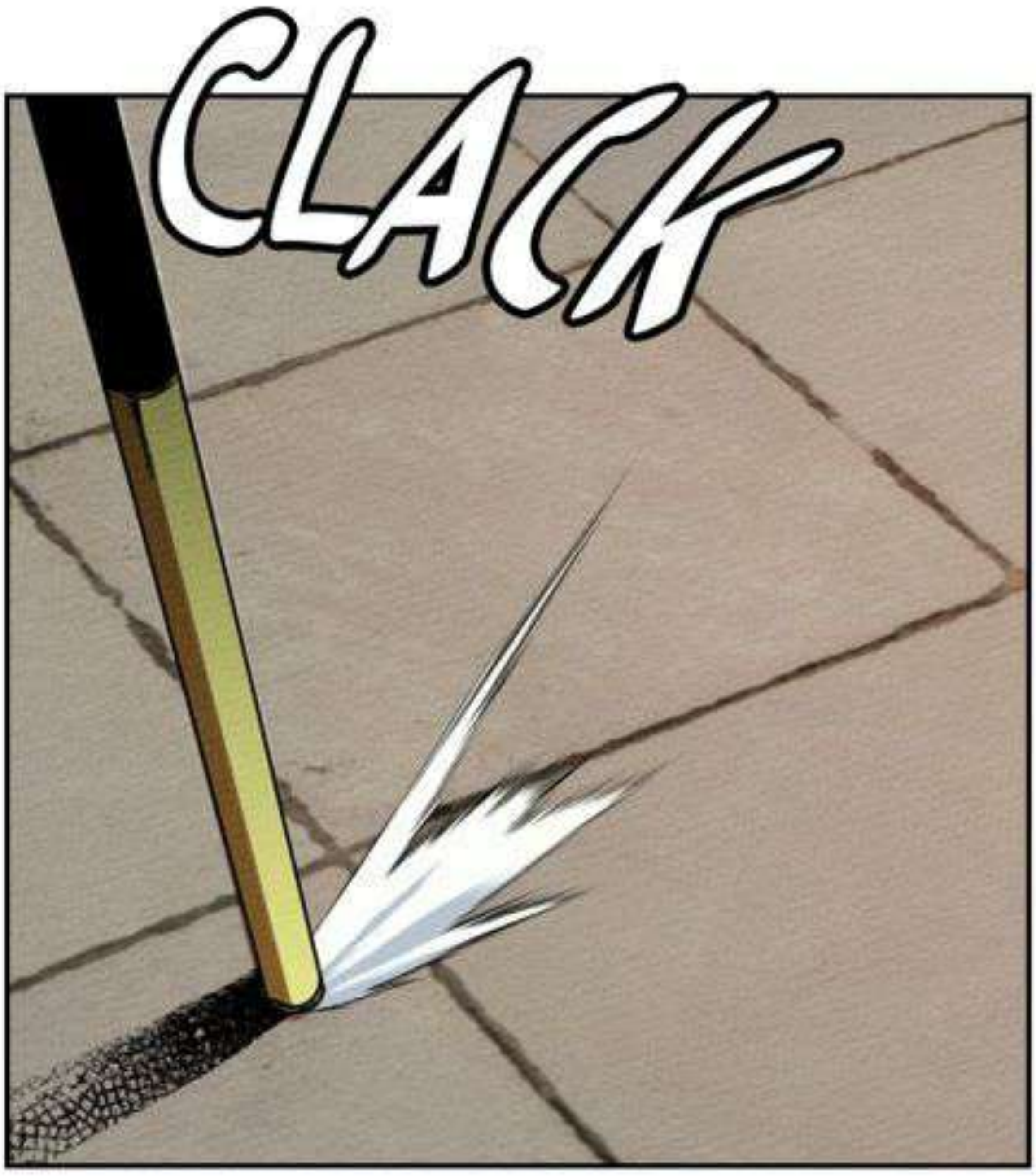

THE ELDEST CROYSO DAUGHTER FACING DIVORCE FROM A LOWLY KNIGHT? I WILL NOT ALLOW—
A STUPID LITTLE THING LIKE YOU TO DRAG OUR FAMILY NAME THROUGH THE GUTTER!


TREMBLE

IT WOULD BE BETTER IF YOU WERE—




KNOCK KNOCK
MY LORD! THE KNIGHTS HAVE ARRIVED!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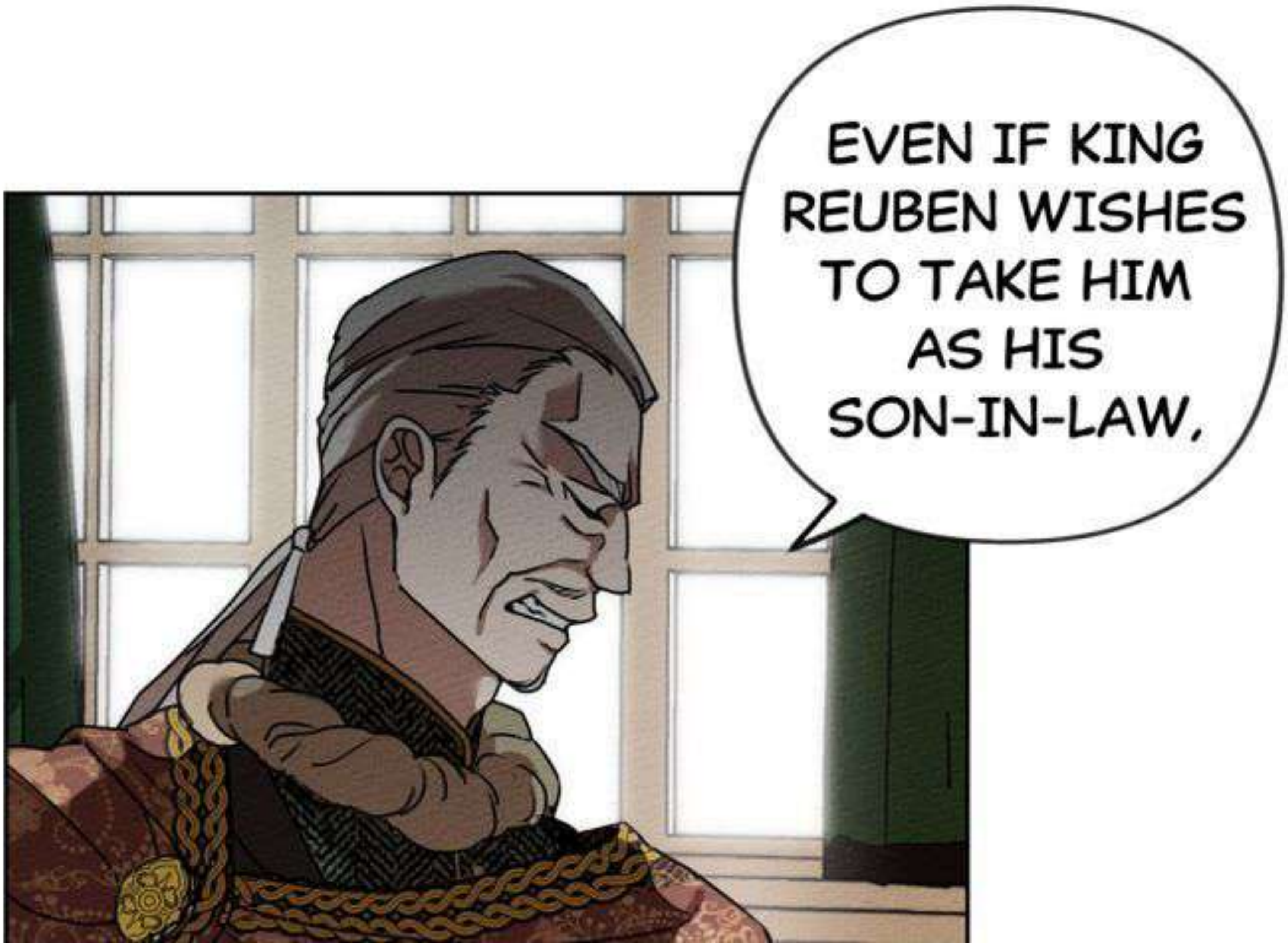
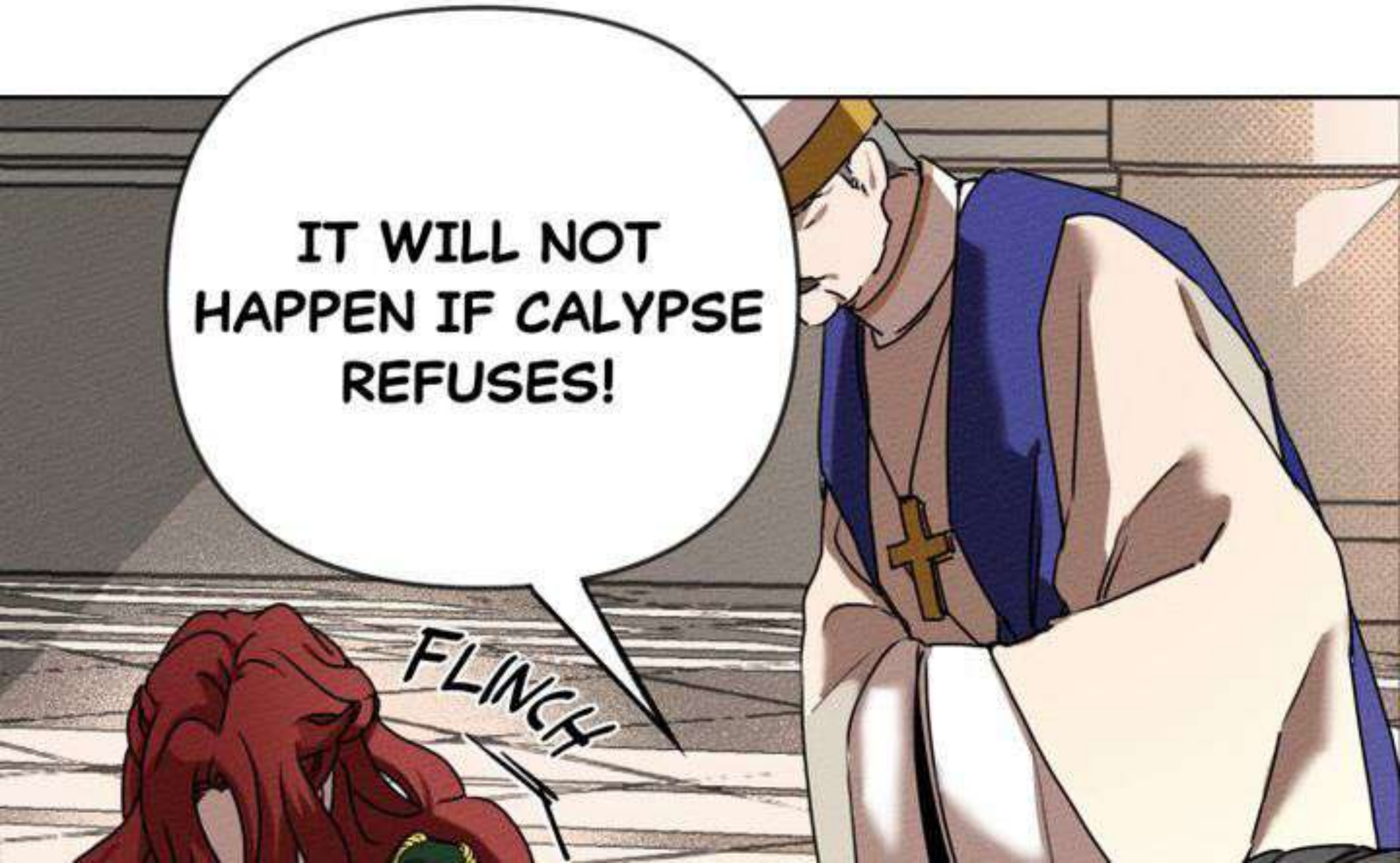
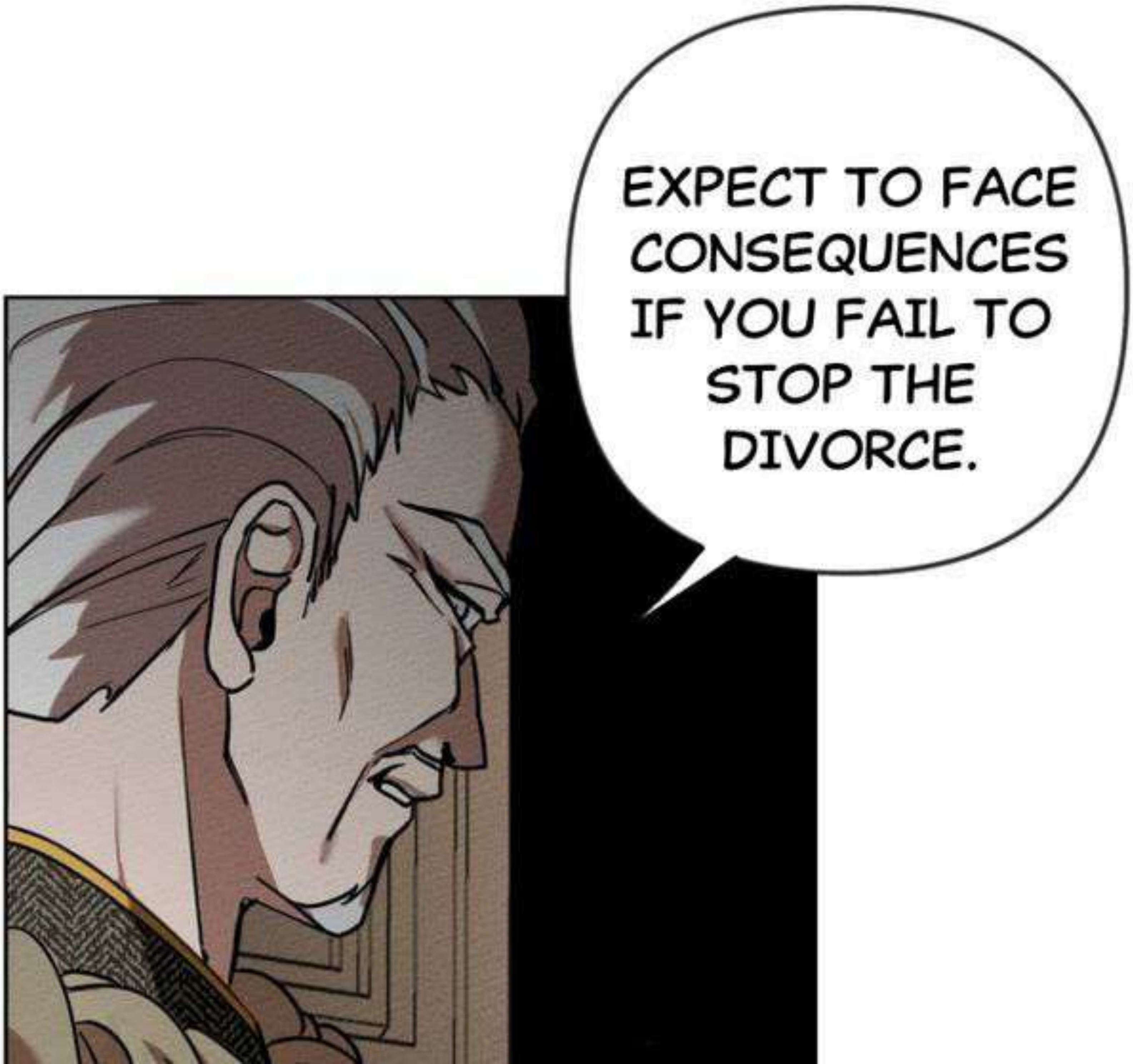
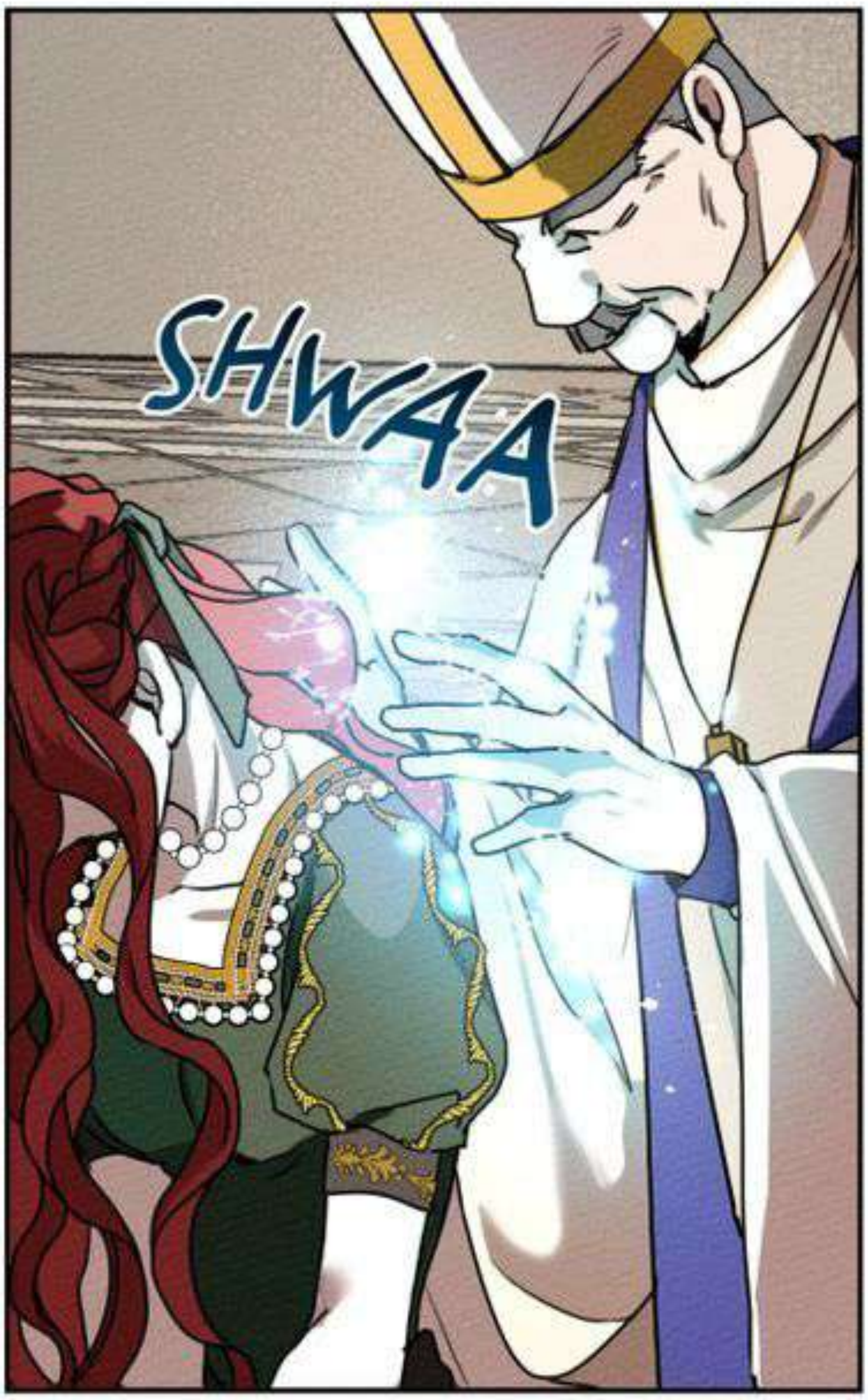
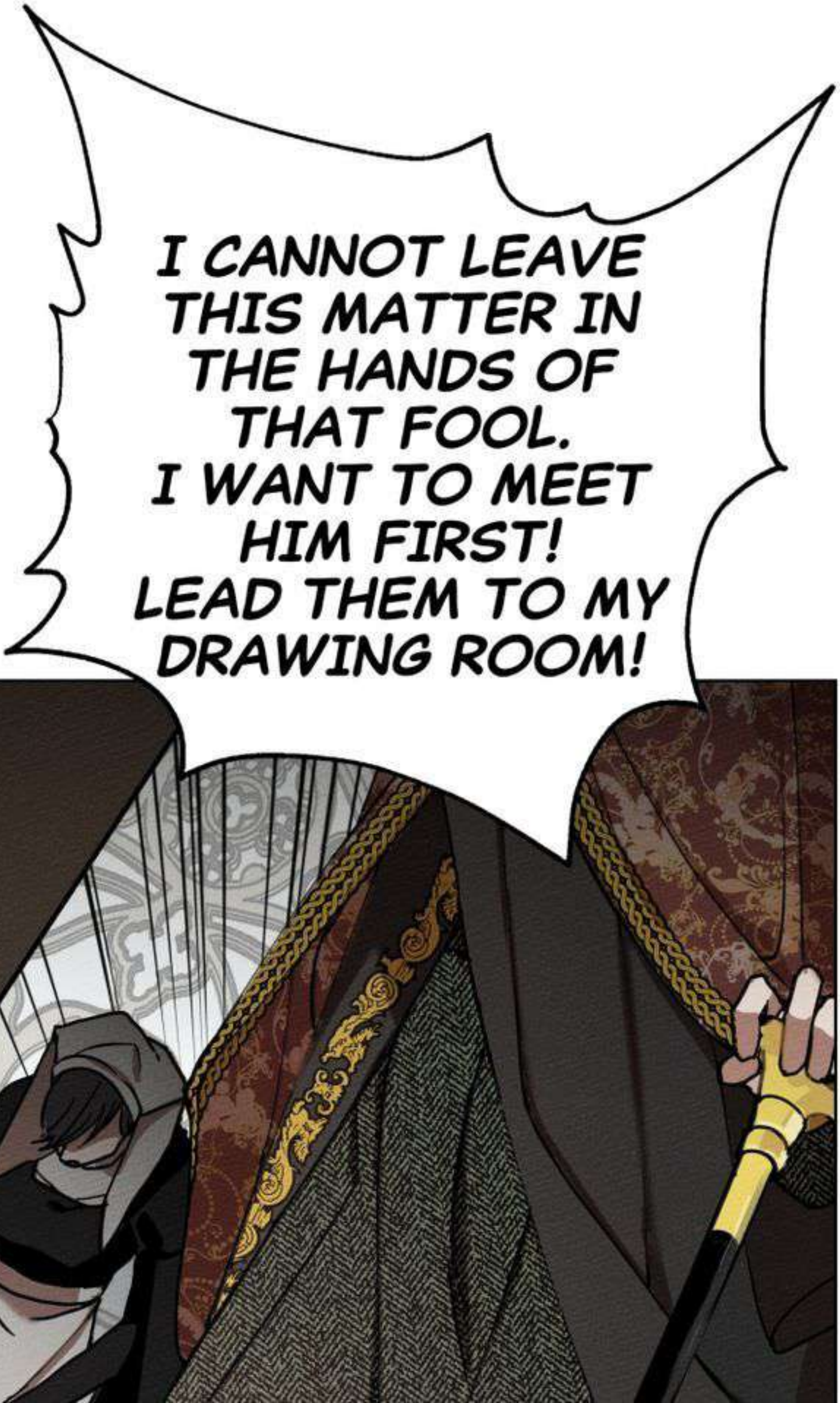

EVEN IF KING REUBEN WISHES TO TAKE HIM AS HIS SON-IN-LAW,

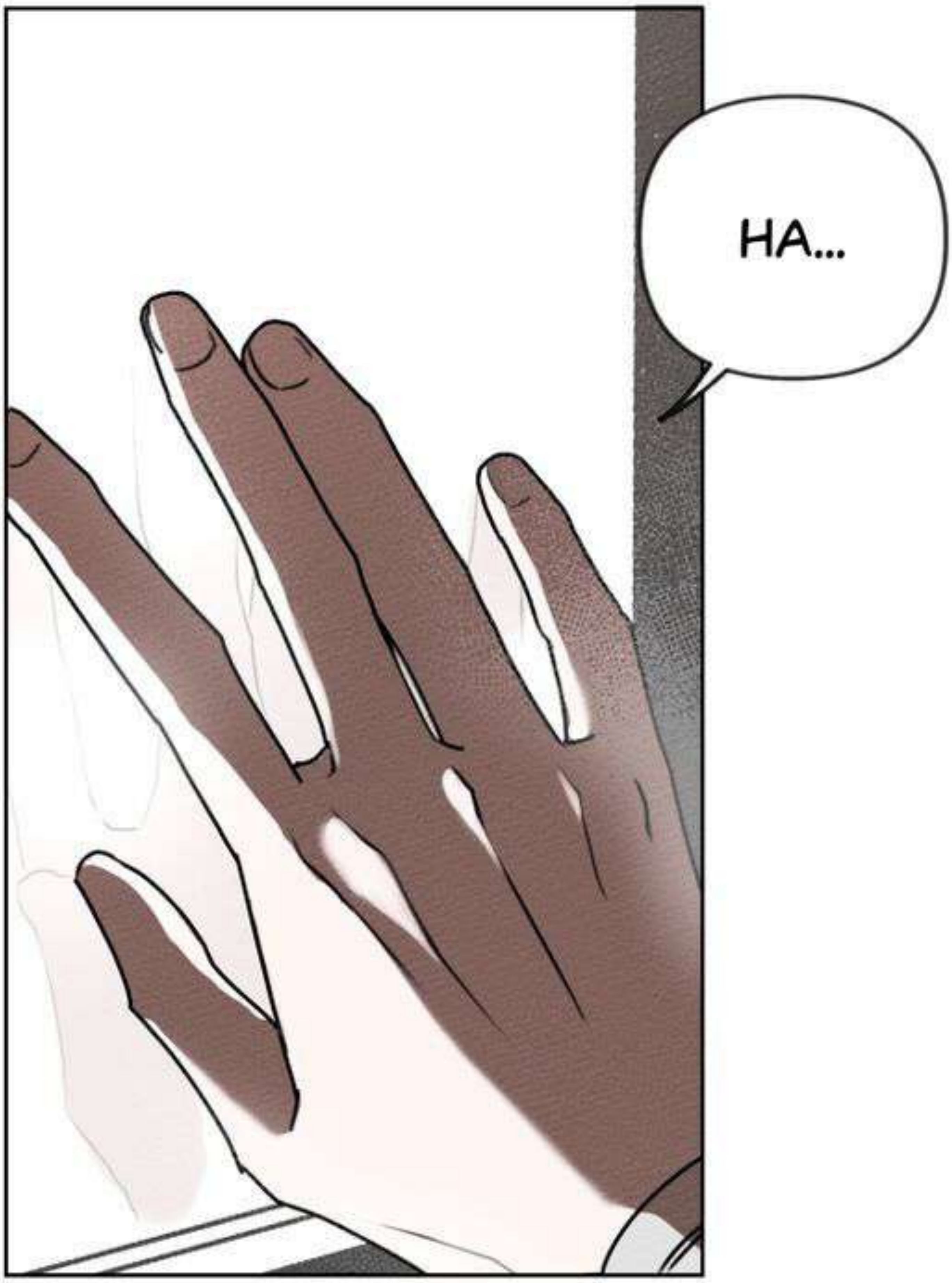

IT WILL NOT HAPPEN IF CALYPSE REFUSES!
FLINCH


EXPECT TO FACE CONSEQUENCES IF YOU FAIL TO STOP THE DIVORCE.


SHWAA

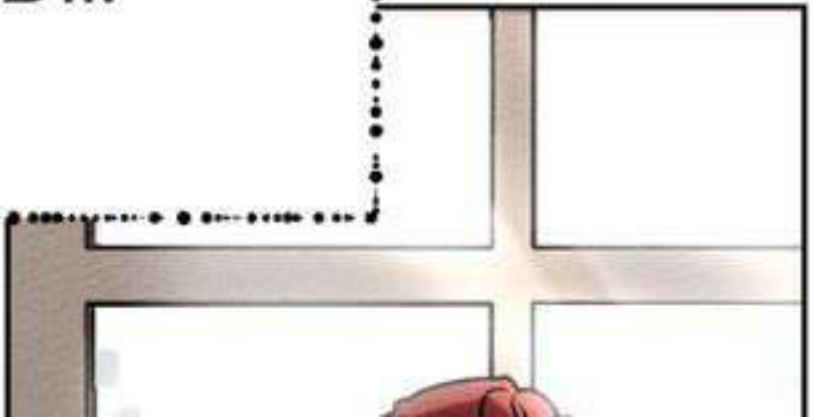

I CANNOT LEAVE THIS MATTER IN THE HANDS OF THAT FOOL. I WANT TO MEET HIM FIRST! LEAD THEM TO MY DRAWING ROOM!

CLUNK

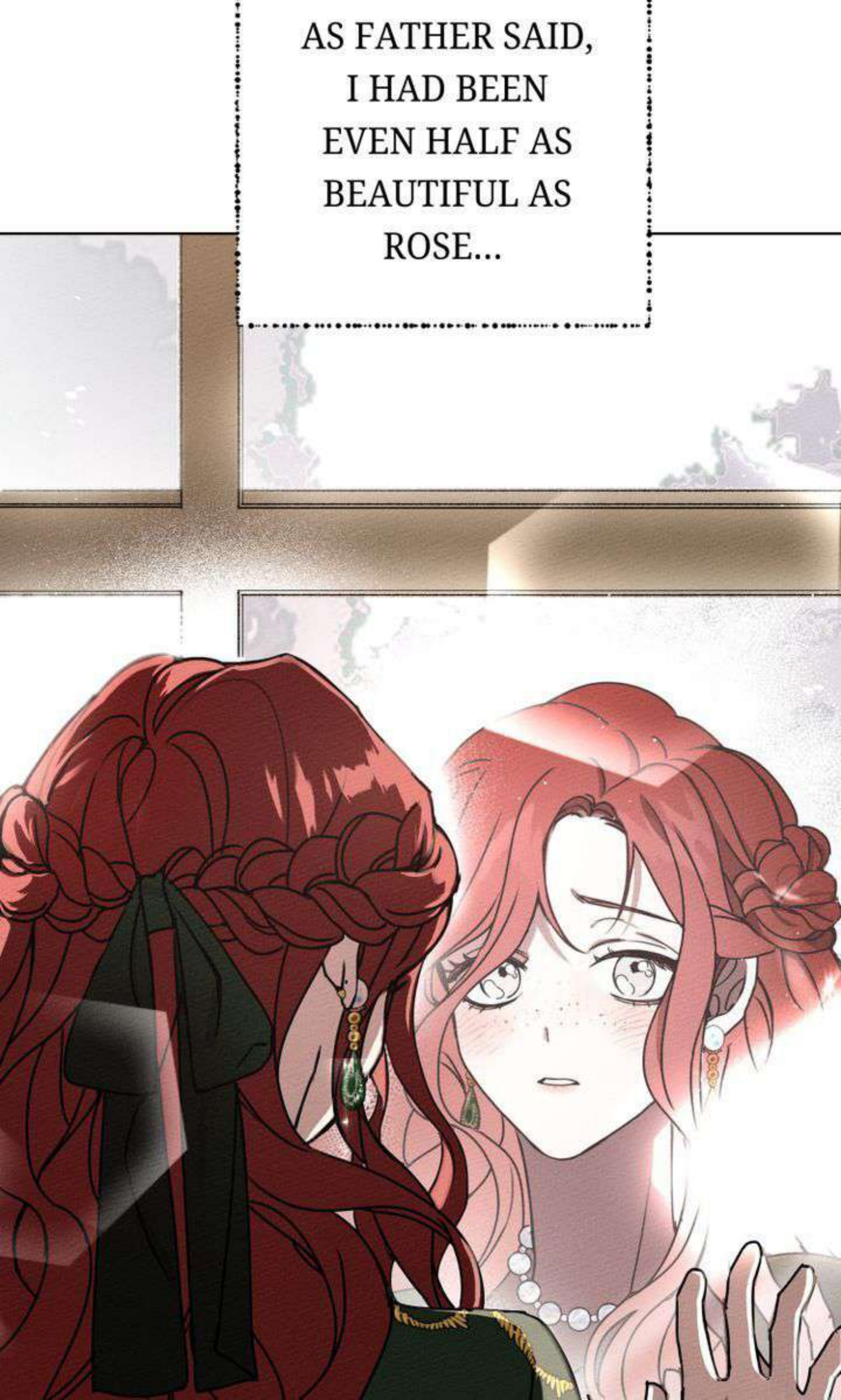

HA...

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME NOW?

THERE IS NO WAY A HOPELESS THING LIKE ME COULD POSSIBLY CHANGE HIS MIND...

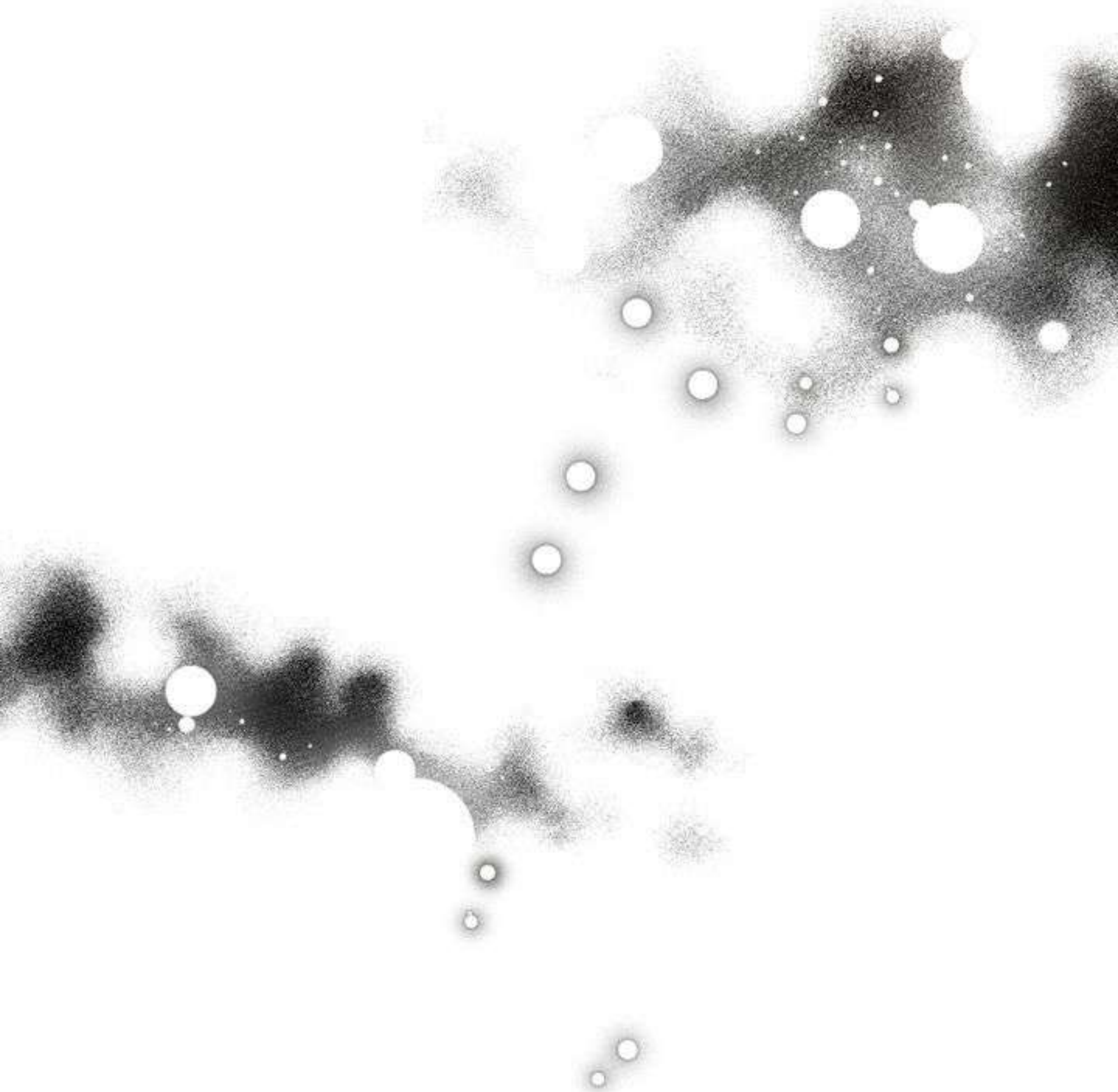


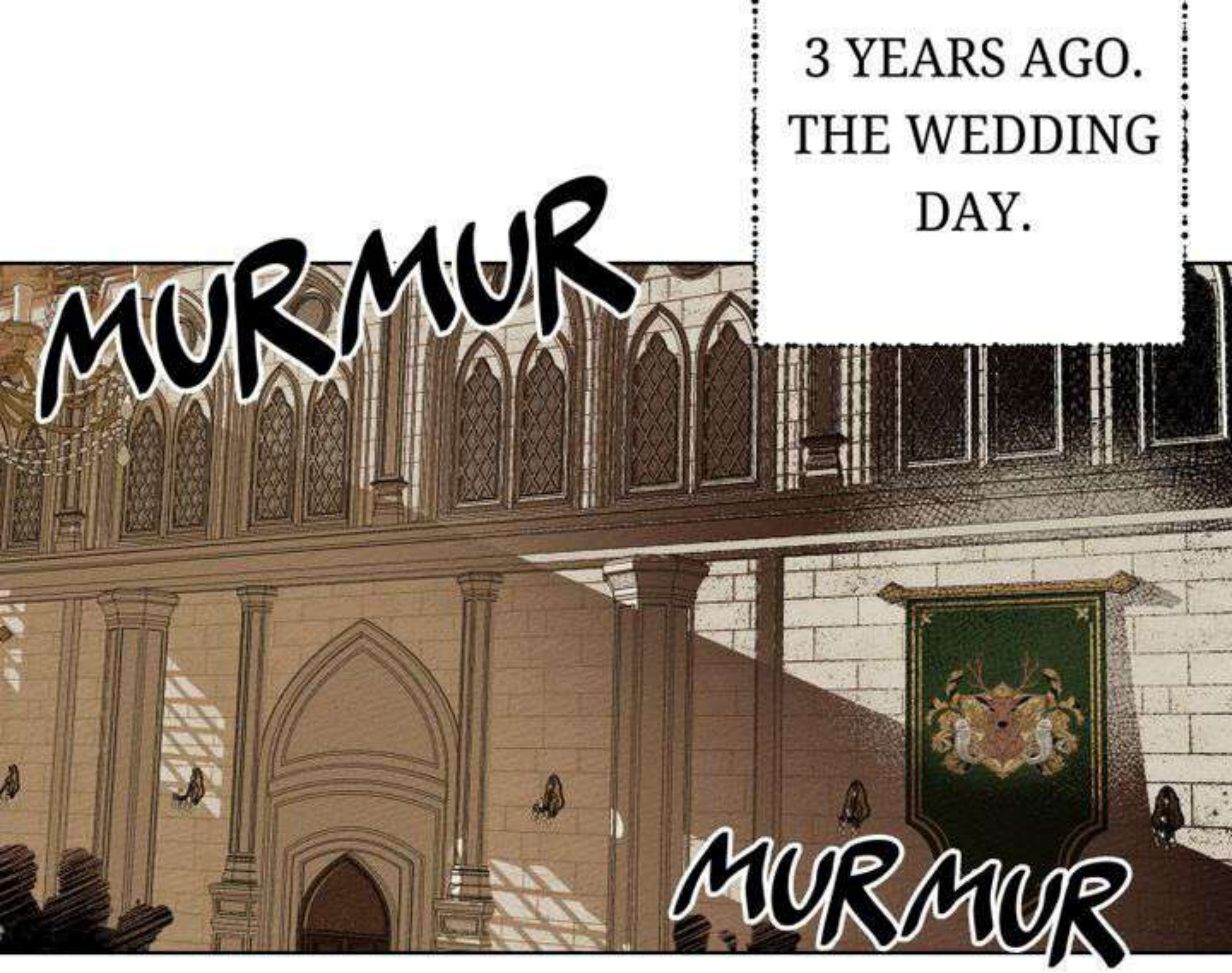
WHAT IF,

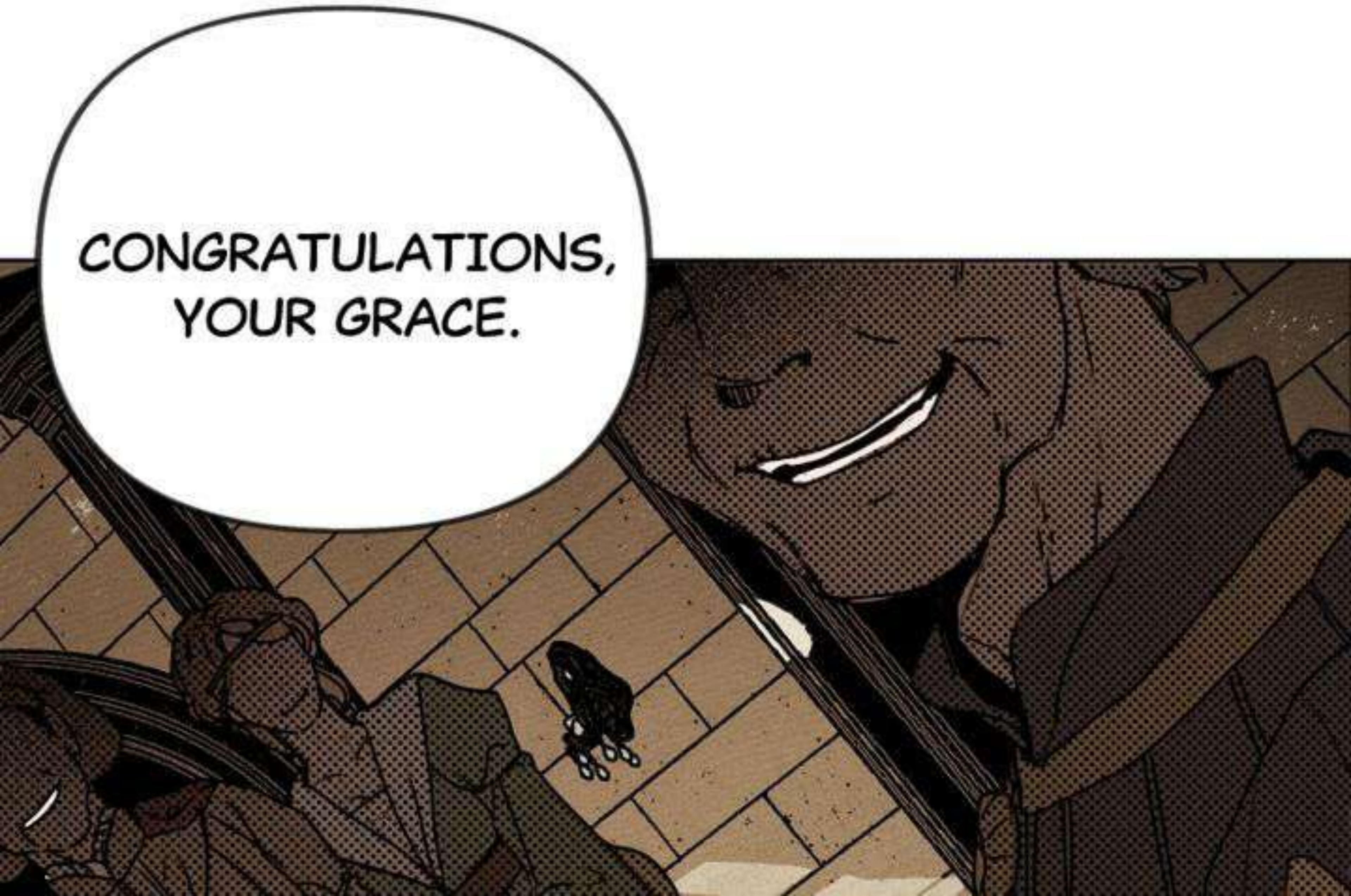

AS FATHER SAID, I HAD BEEN EVEN HALF AS BEAUTIFUL AS ROSE...

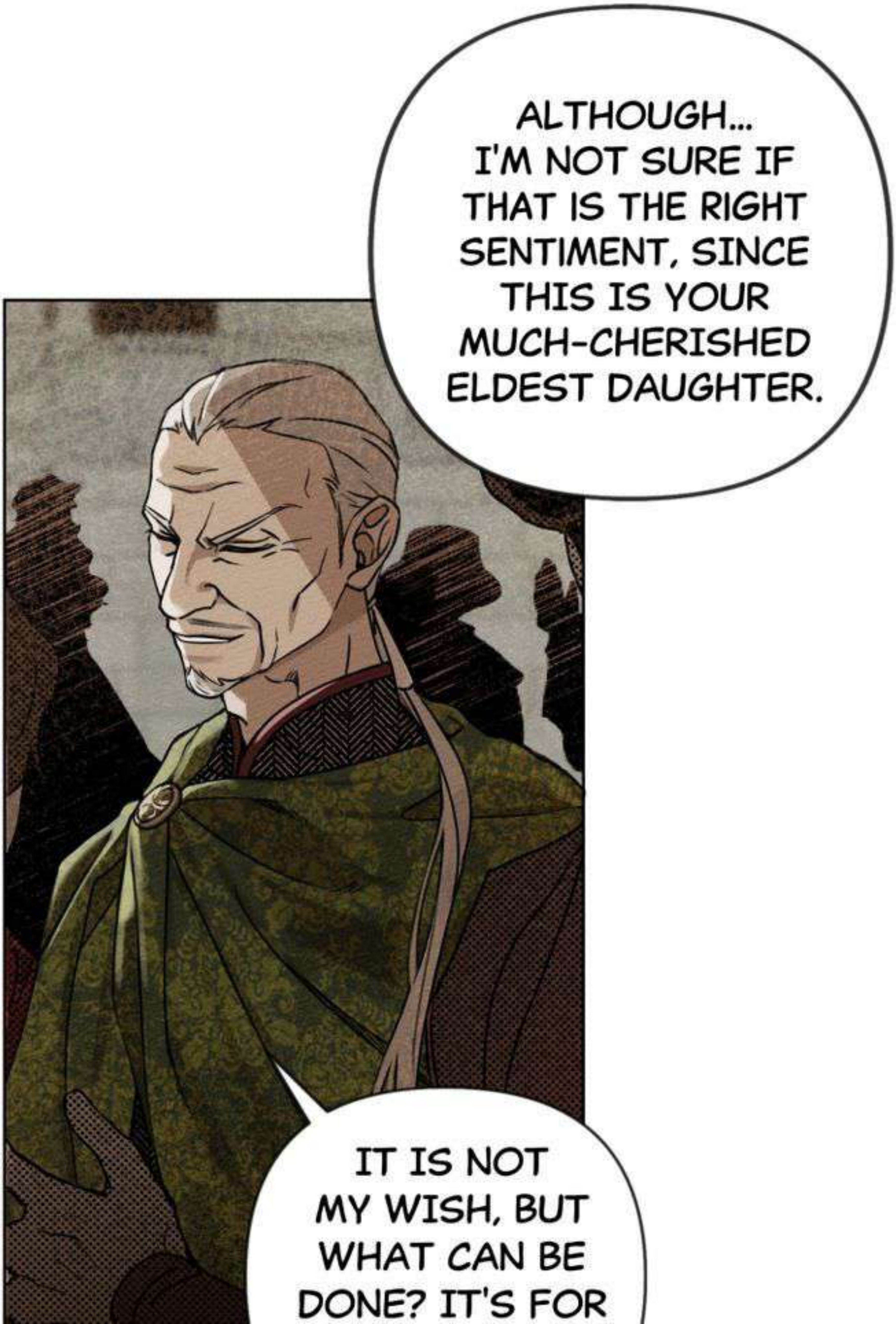
WOULD RIFTAN
STILL HAVE LEFT

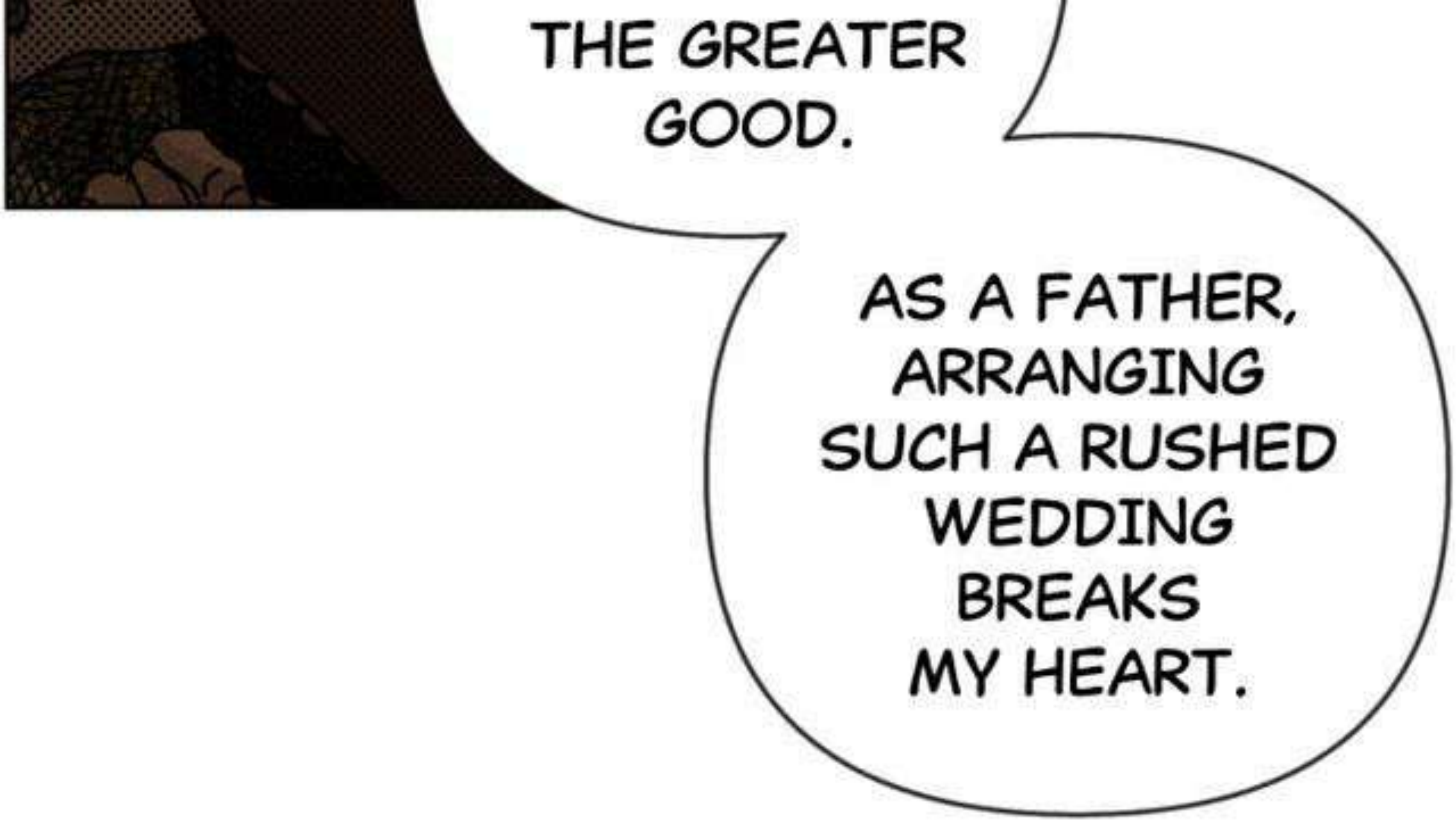
THE WAY HE DID?

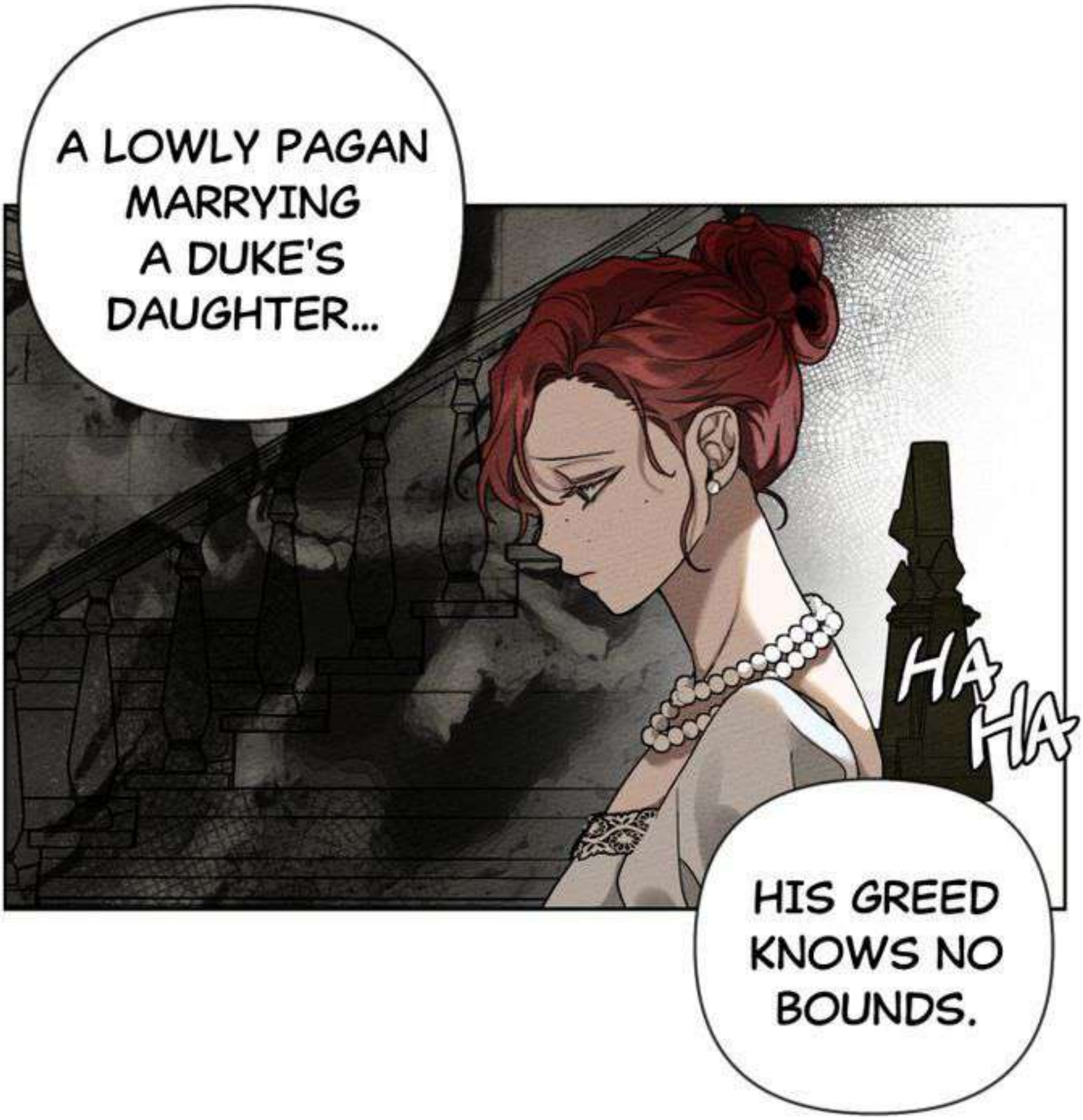


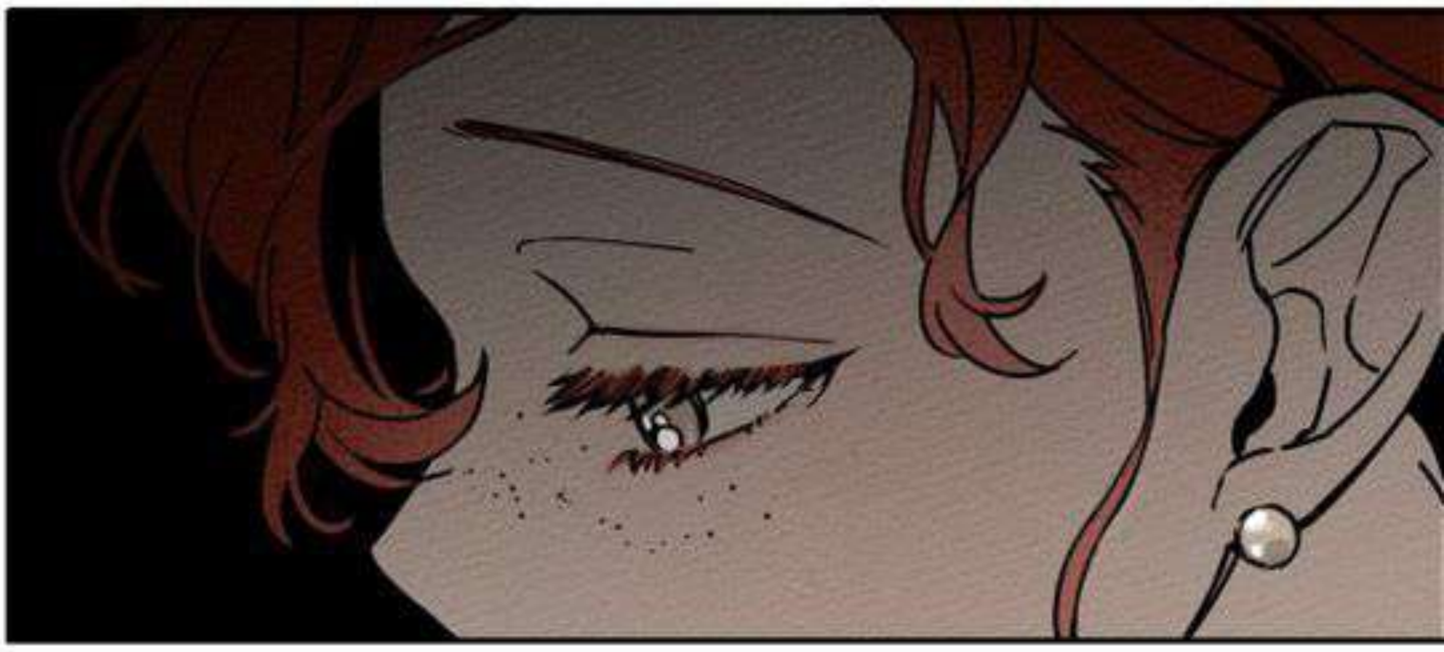

3 YEARS AGO. THE WEDDING DAY.
MURMUR
MURMUR


CONGRATULATIONS, YOUR GRACE.

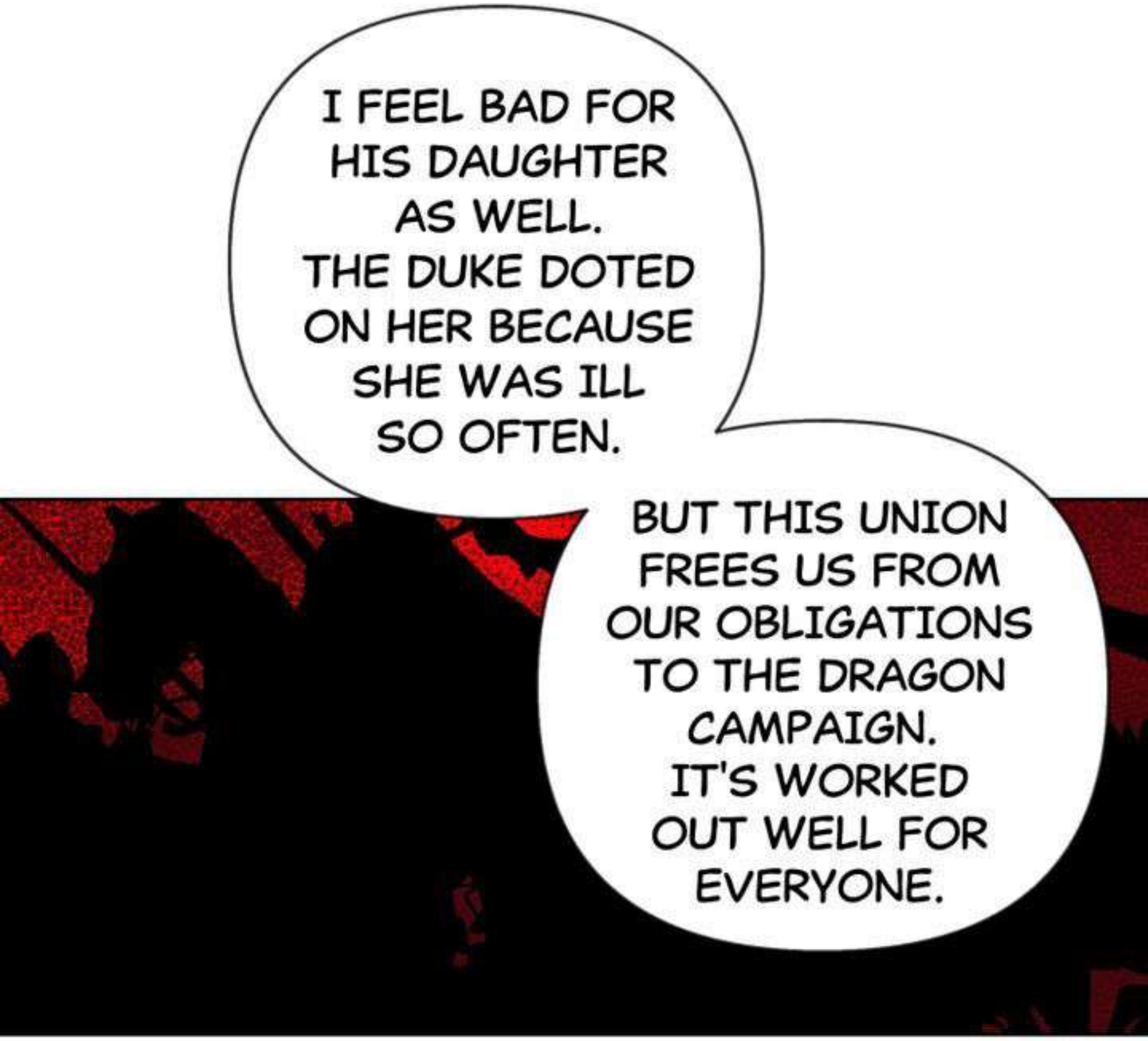

ALTHOUGH... I'M NOT SURE IF THAT IS THE RIGHT SENTIMENT, SINCE THIS IS YOUR MUCH-CHERISHED ELDEST DAUGHTER.
IT IS NOT MY WISH, BUT WHAT CAN BE DONE? IT'S FOR

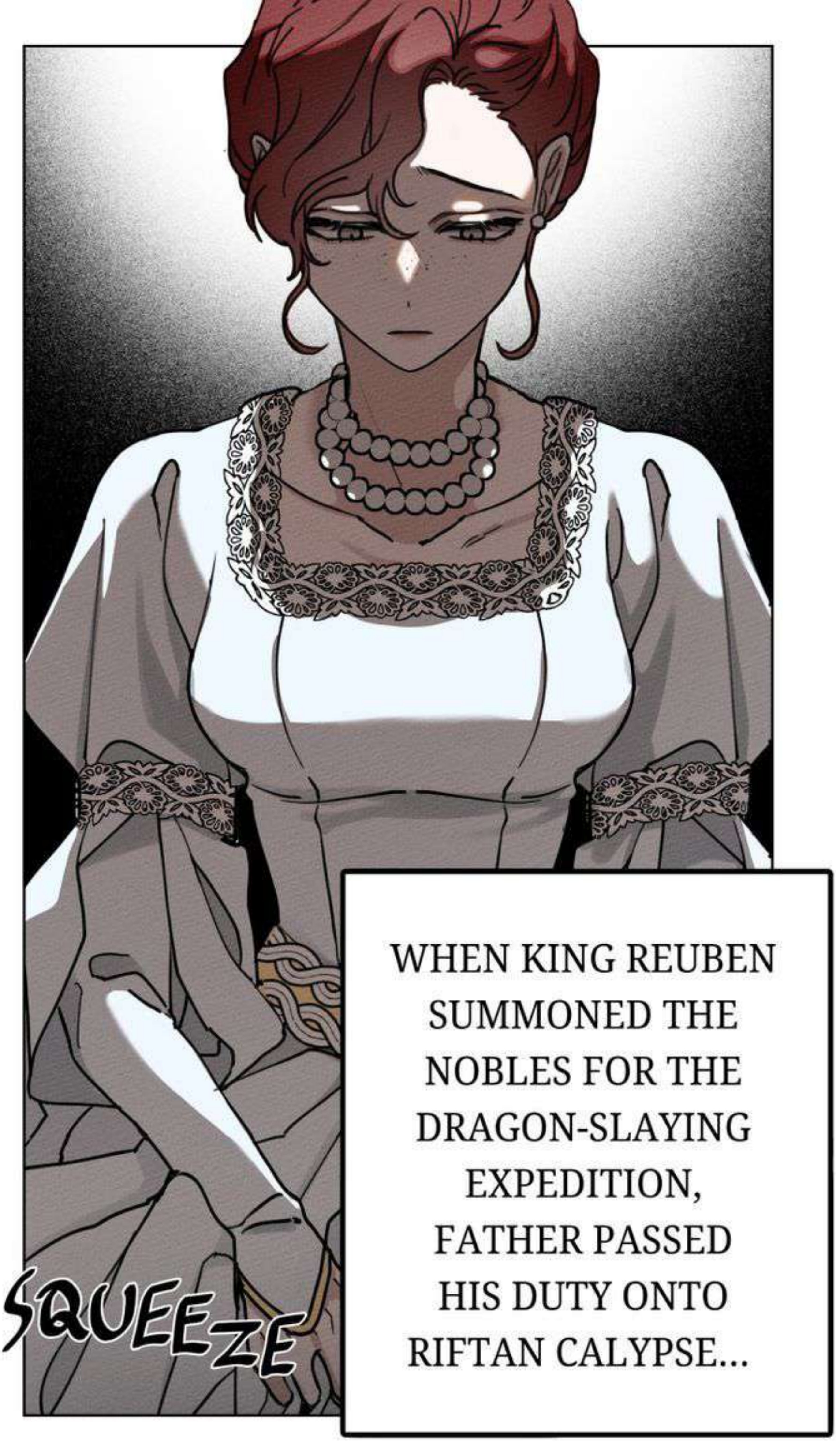

THE GREATER GOOD.
AS A FATHER, ARRANGING SUCH A RUSHED WEDDING BREAKS MY HEART.


A LOWLY PAGAN MARRYING A DUKE'S DAUGHTER...
HA HA
HIS GREED KNOWS NO BOUNDS.



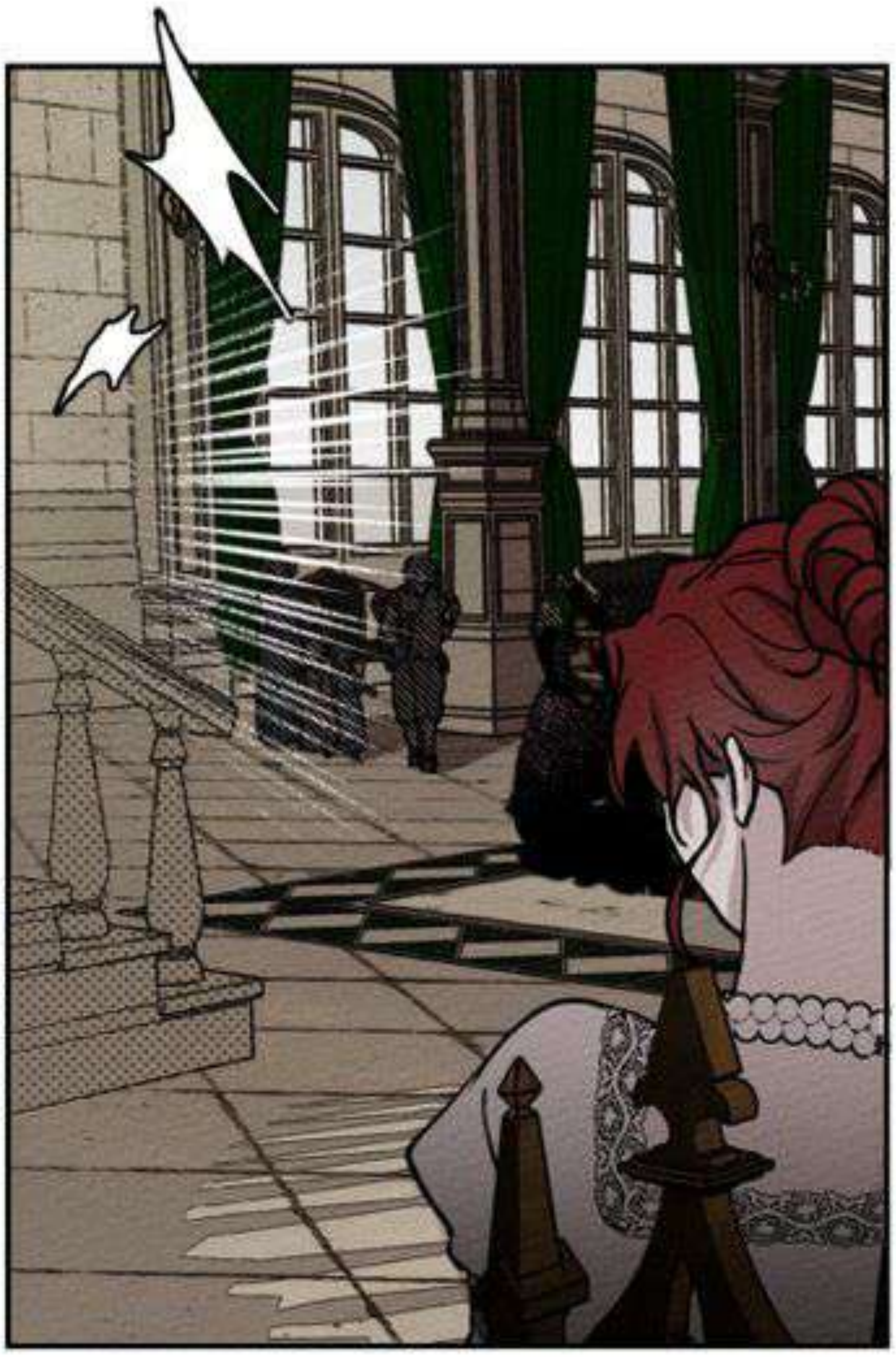
THE ONE TO BE BLAMED FOR THIS MARRIAGE IS NOT THE "PAGAN" RIFTAN CALPYSE.

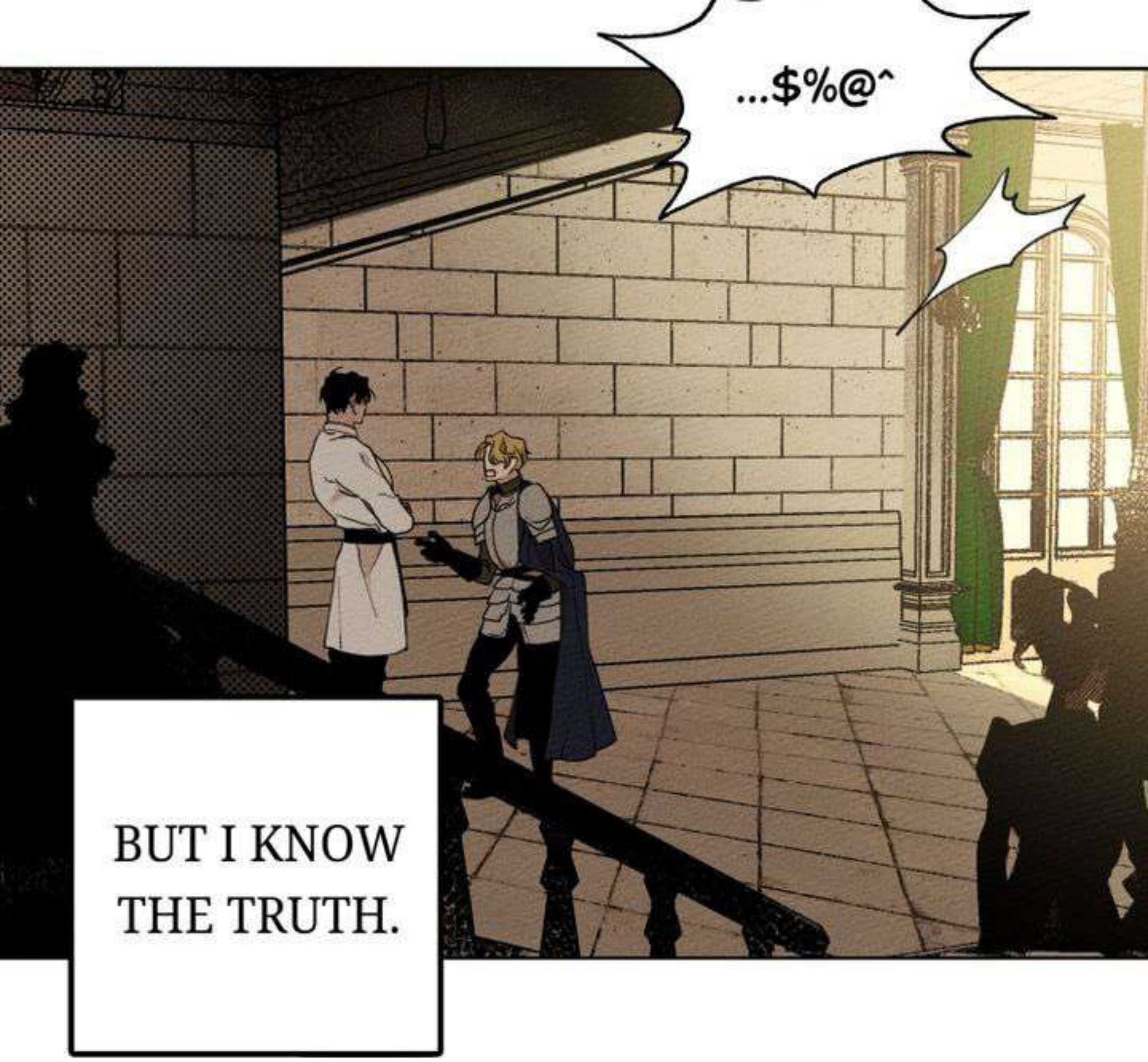

I FEEL BAD FOR HIS DAUGHTER AS WELL. THE DUKE DOTED ON HER BECAUSE SHE WAS ILL SO OFTEN.
BUT THIS UNION FREES US FROM OUR OBLIGATIONS TO THE DRAGON CAMPAIGN. IT'S WORKED OUT WELL FOR EVERYONE.

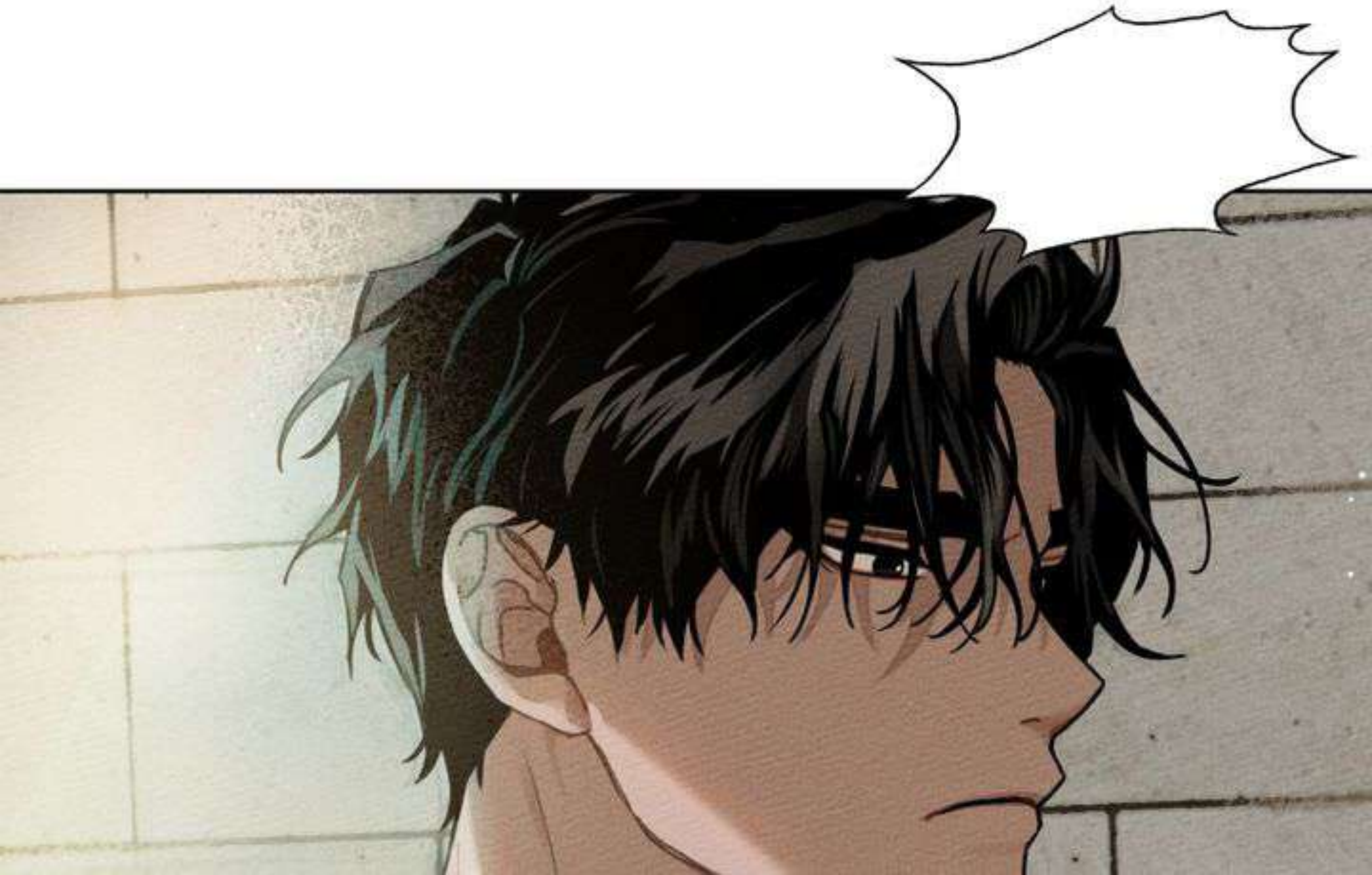

WHEN KING REUBEN SUMMONED THE NOBLES FOR THE DRAGON-SLAYING EXPEDITION, FATHER PASSED HIS DUTY ONTO RIFTAN CALYPSE...
SQUEEZE

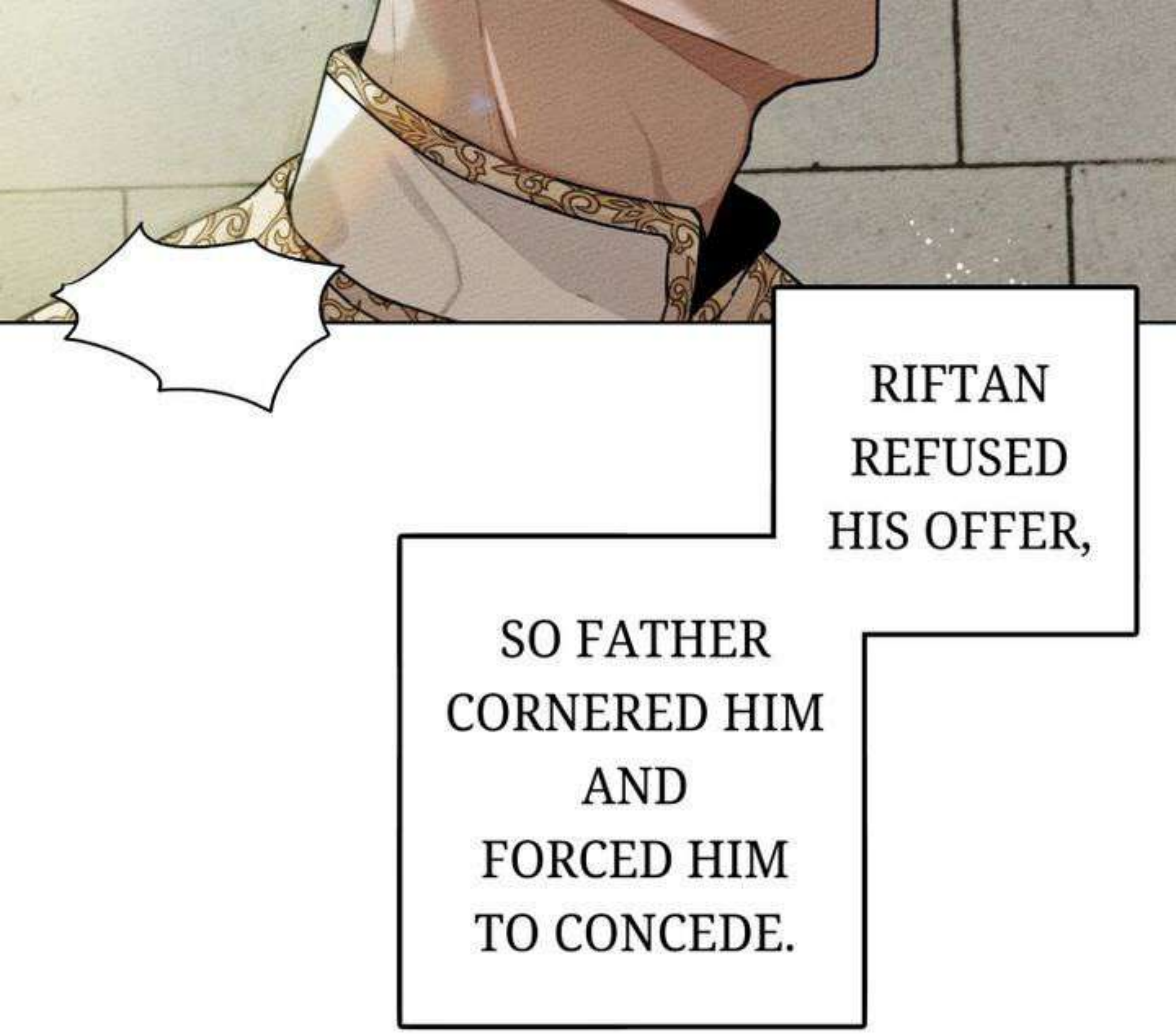
...IN EXCHANGE FOR THE USELESS MAXIMILIAN CROYSO.

THIS IS PREPOSTEROUS!

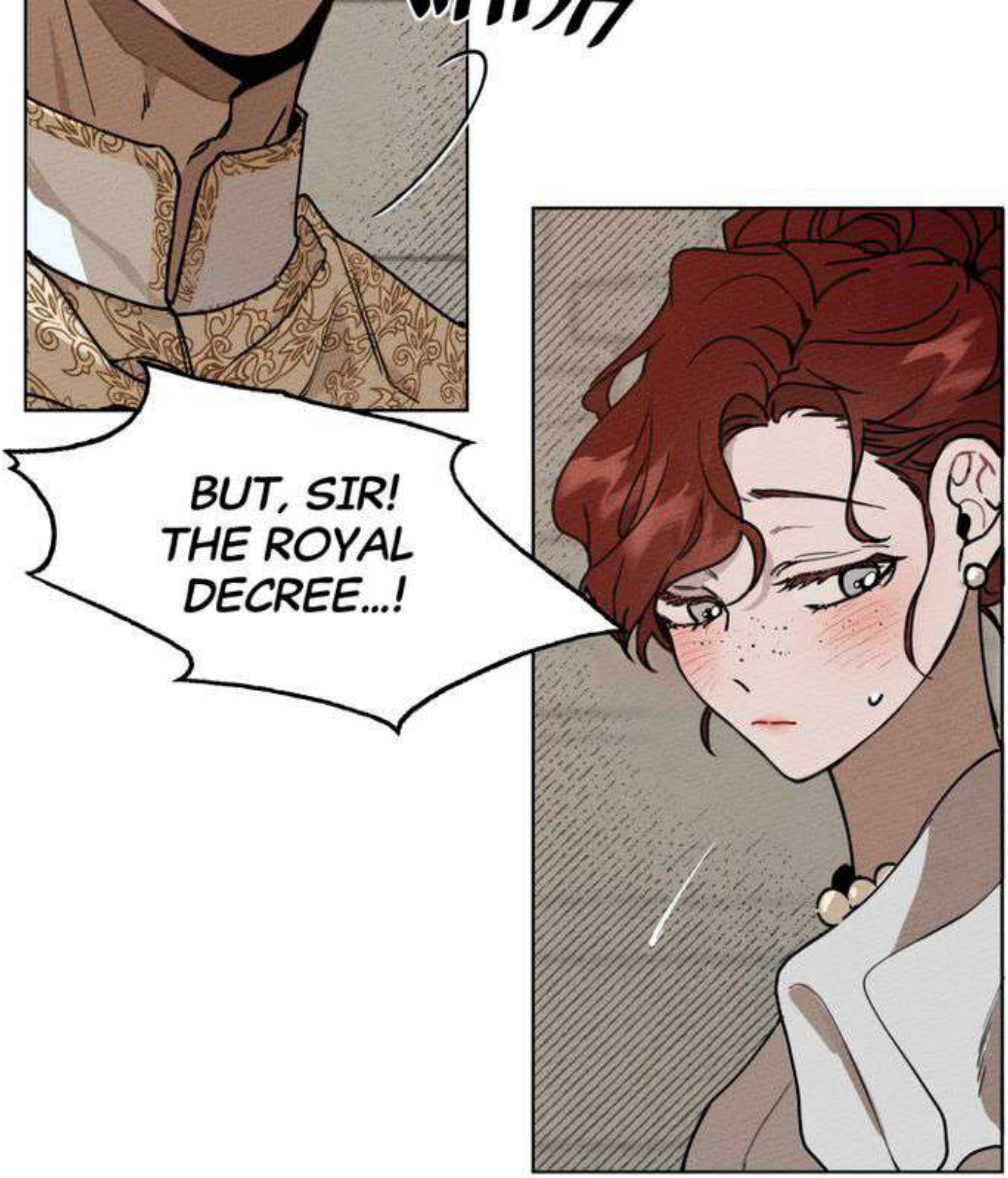



...$%@^
BUT I KNOW THE TRUTH.

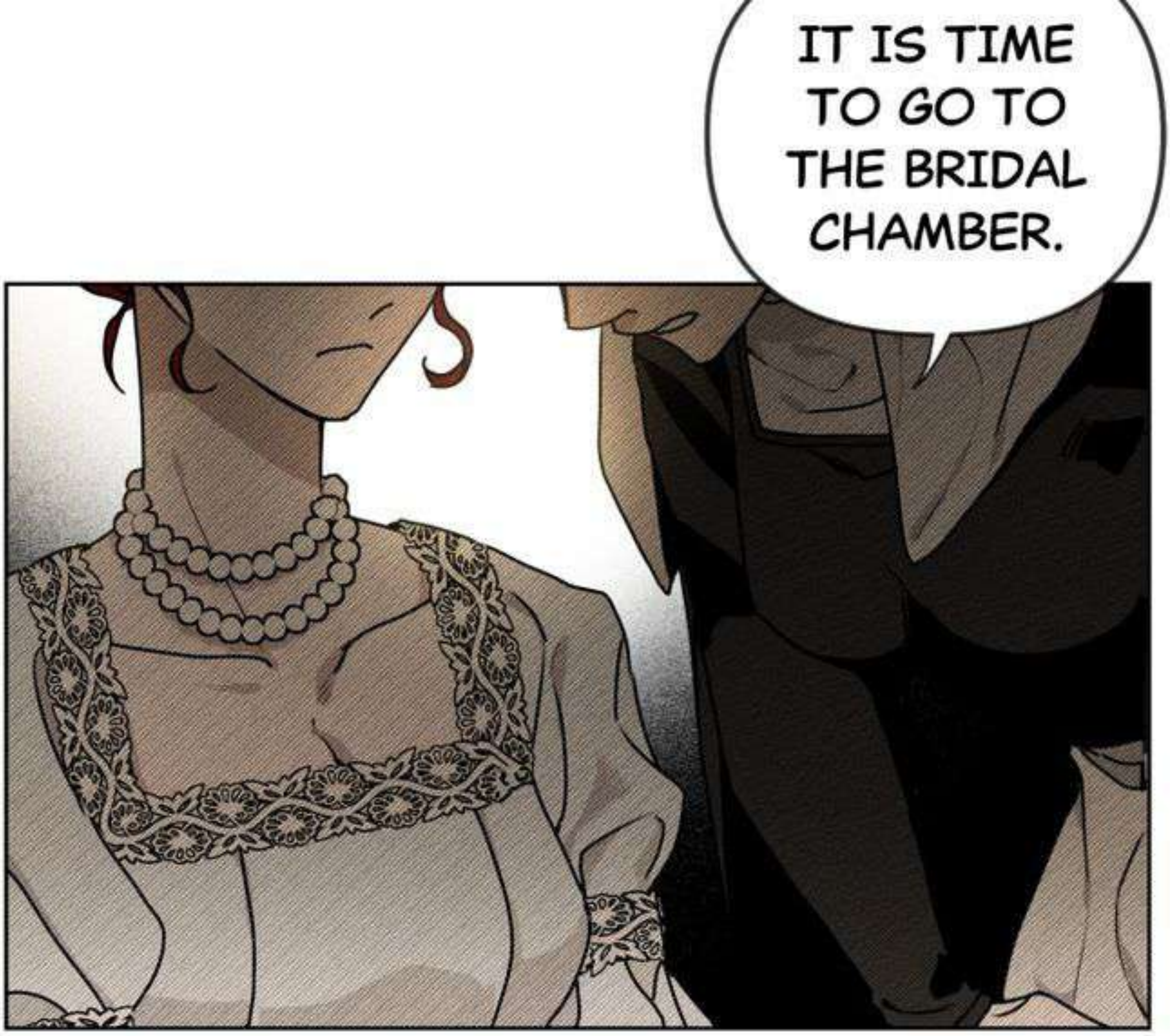



RIFTAN REFUSED HIS OFFER,
SO FATHER CORNERED HIM AND FORCED HIM TO CONCEDE.

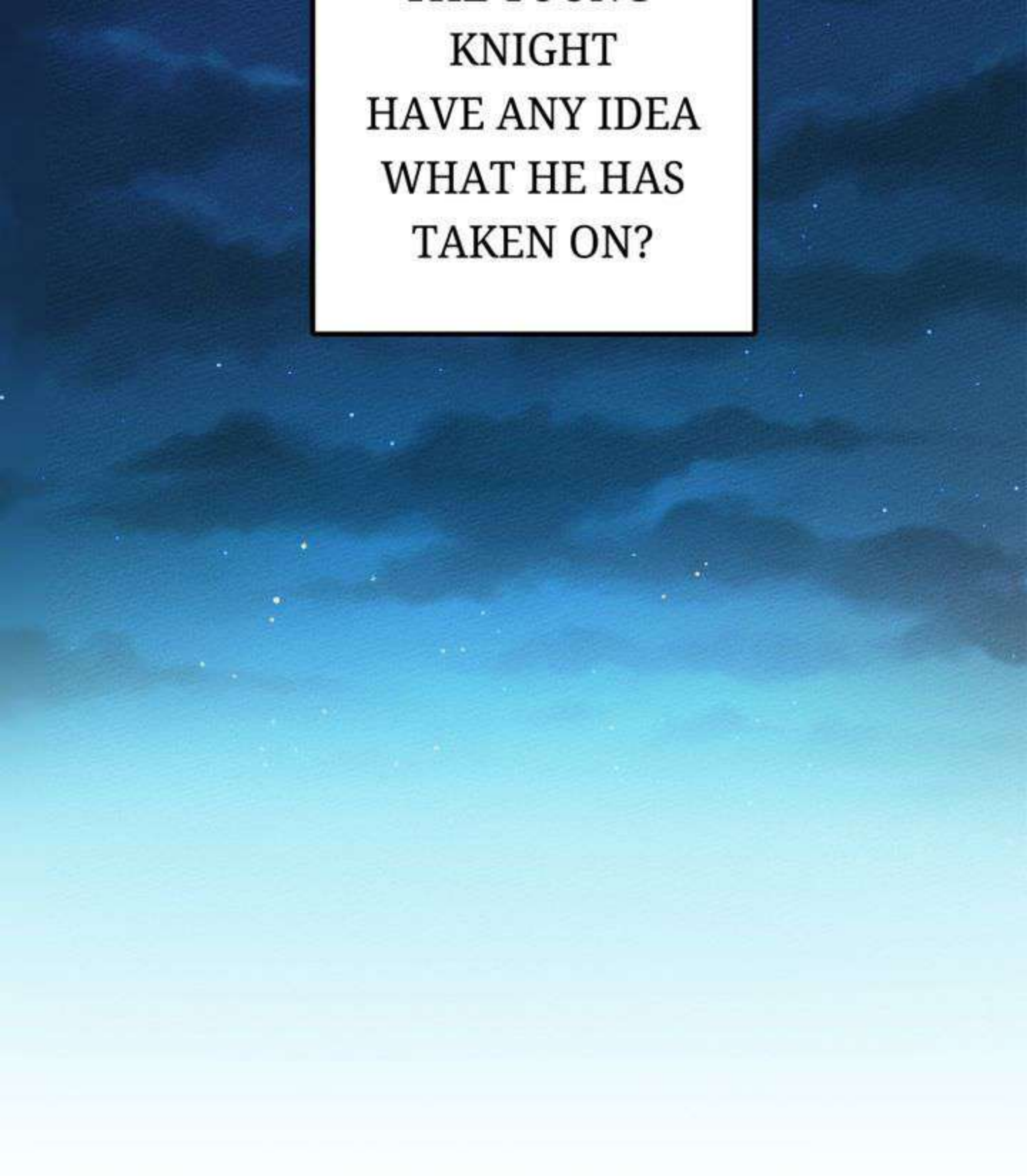
WHISH

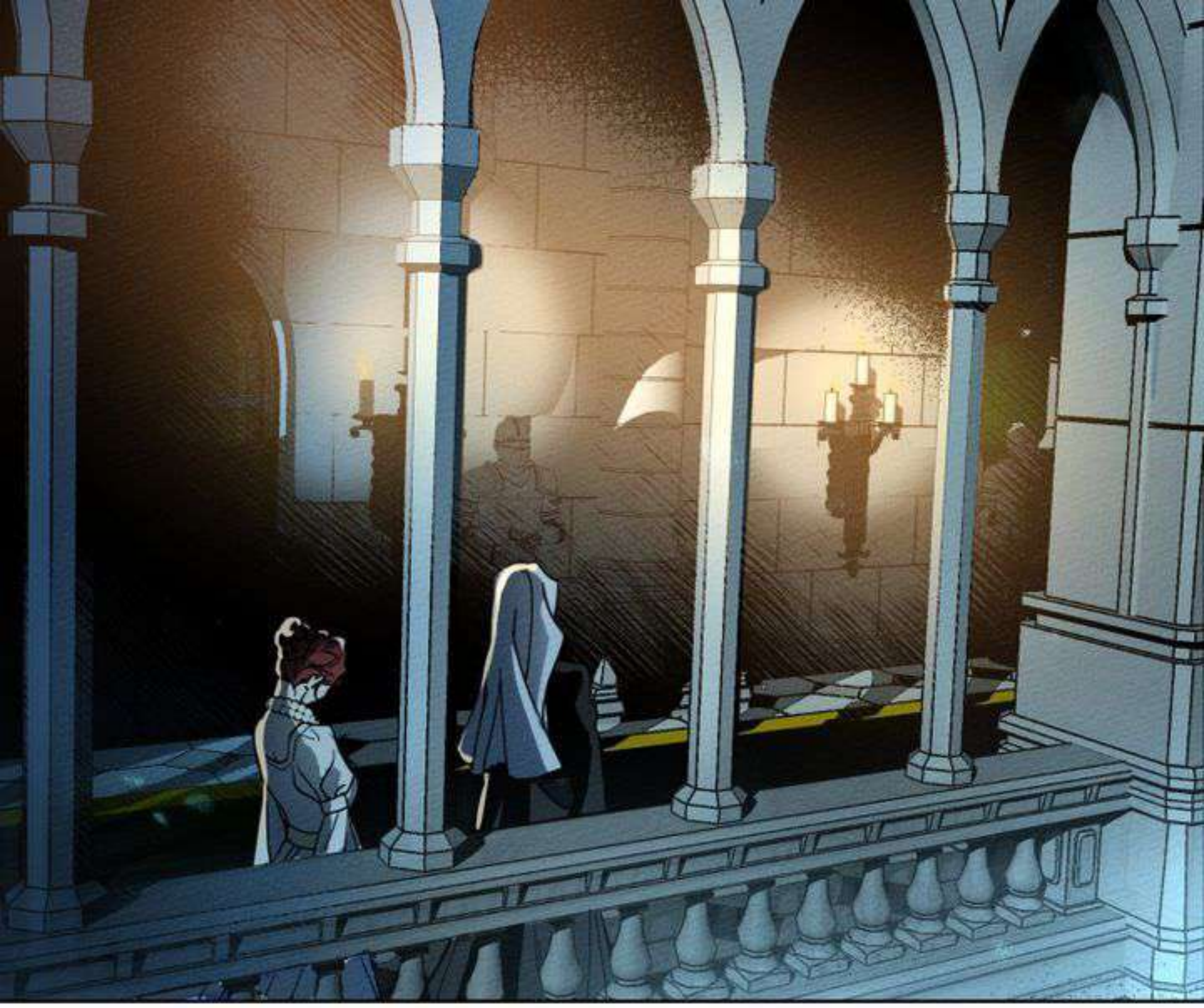

BUT, SIR! THE ROYAL DECREE...!

MY LADY.

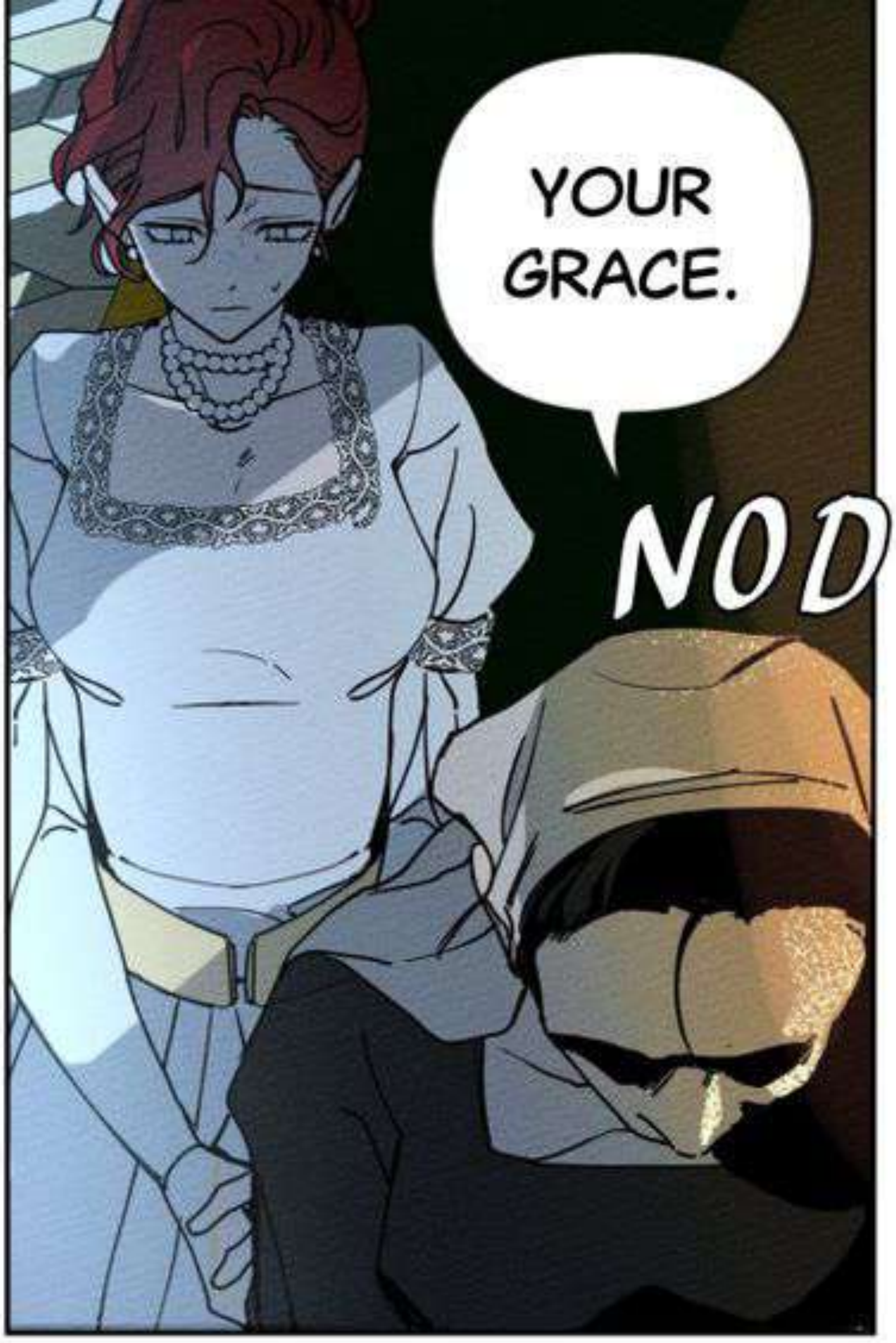

IT IS TIME TO GO TO THE BRIDAL CHAMBER.

BUT DOES THE YOUNG


KNIGHT
HAVE ANY IDEA
WHAT HE HAS
TAKEN ON?

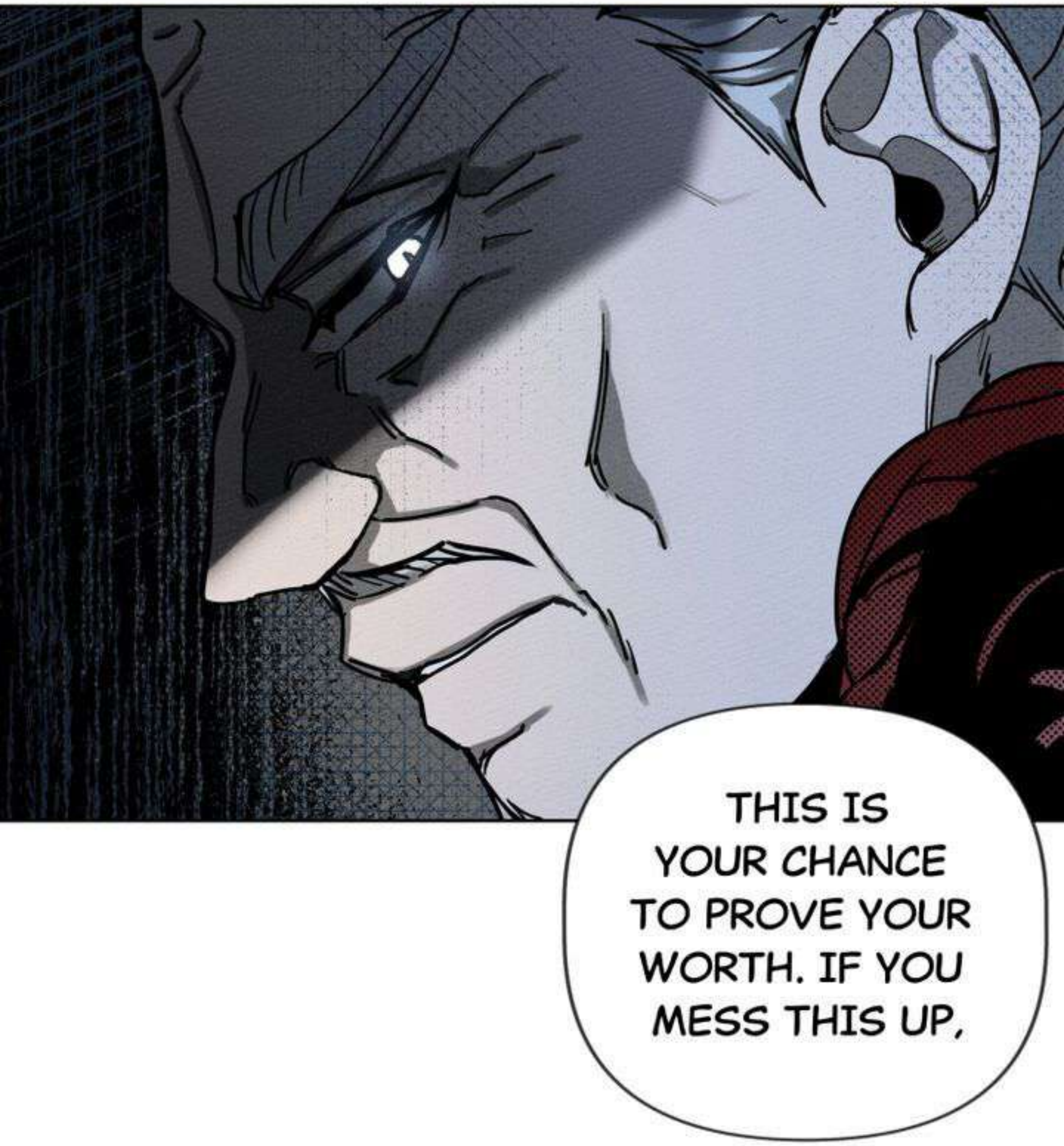


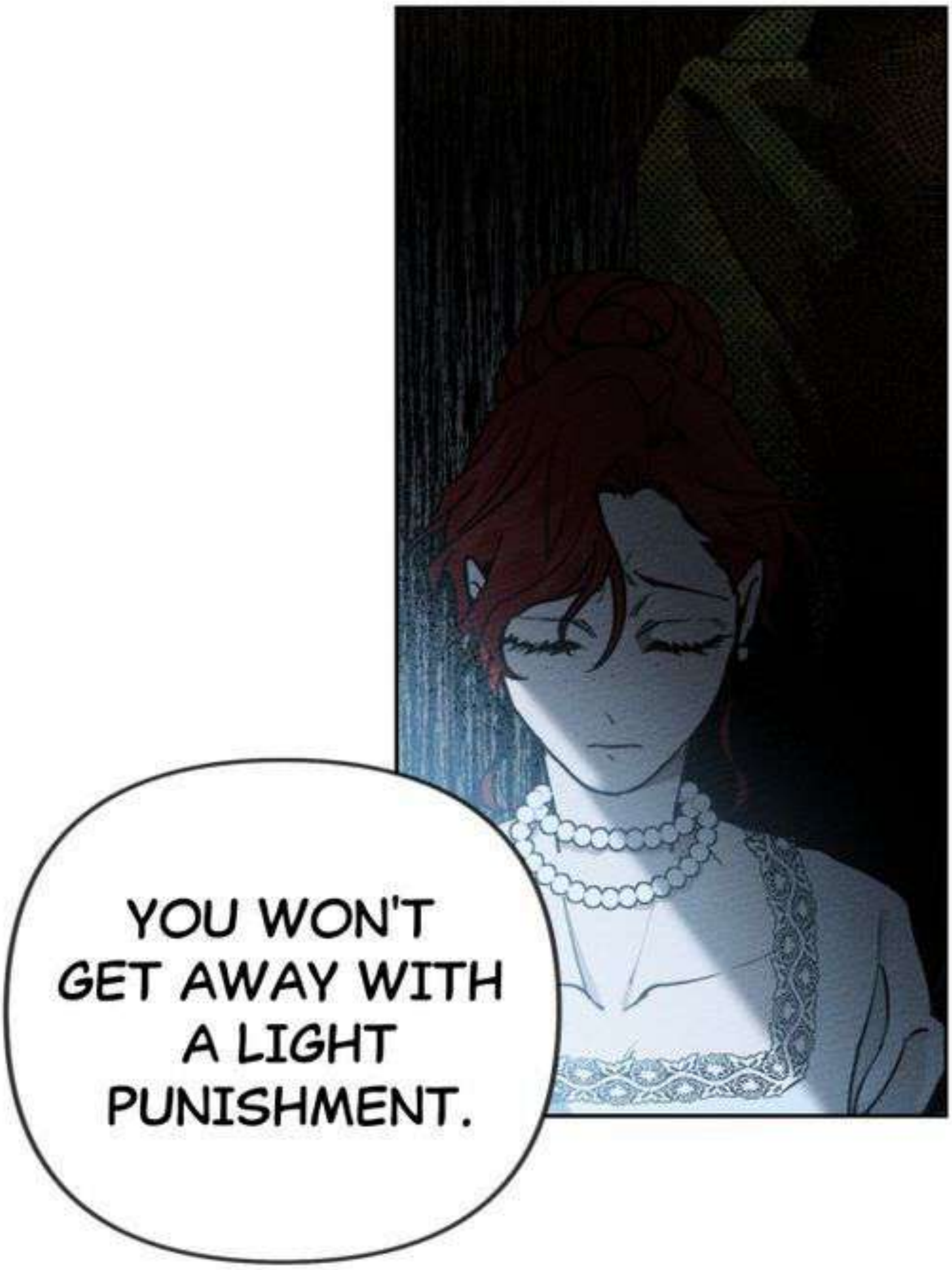
CLOMP
CLOMP

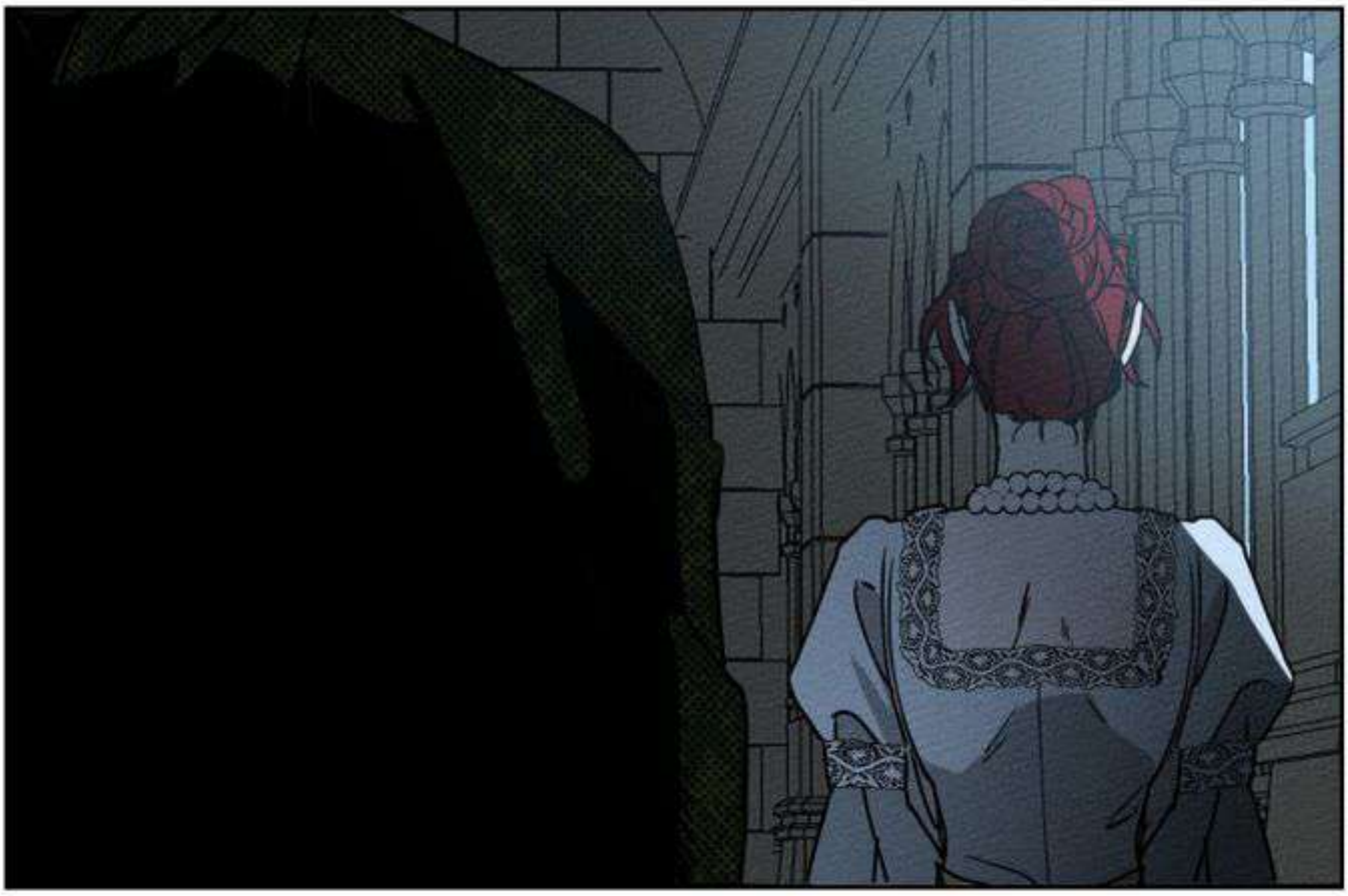

YOUR GRACE.
NOD

YOU USELESS THING.

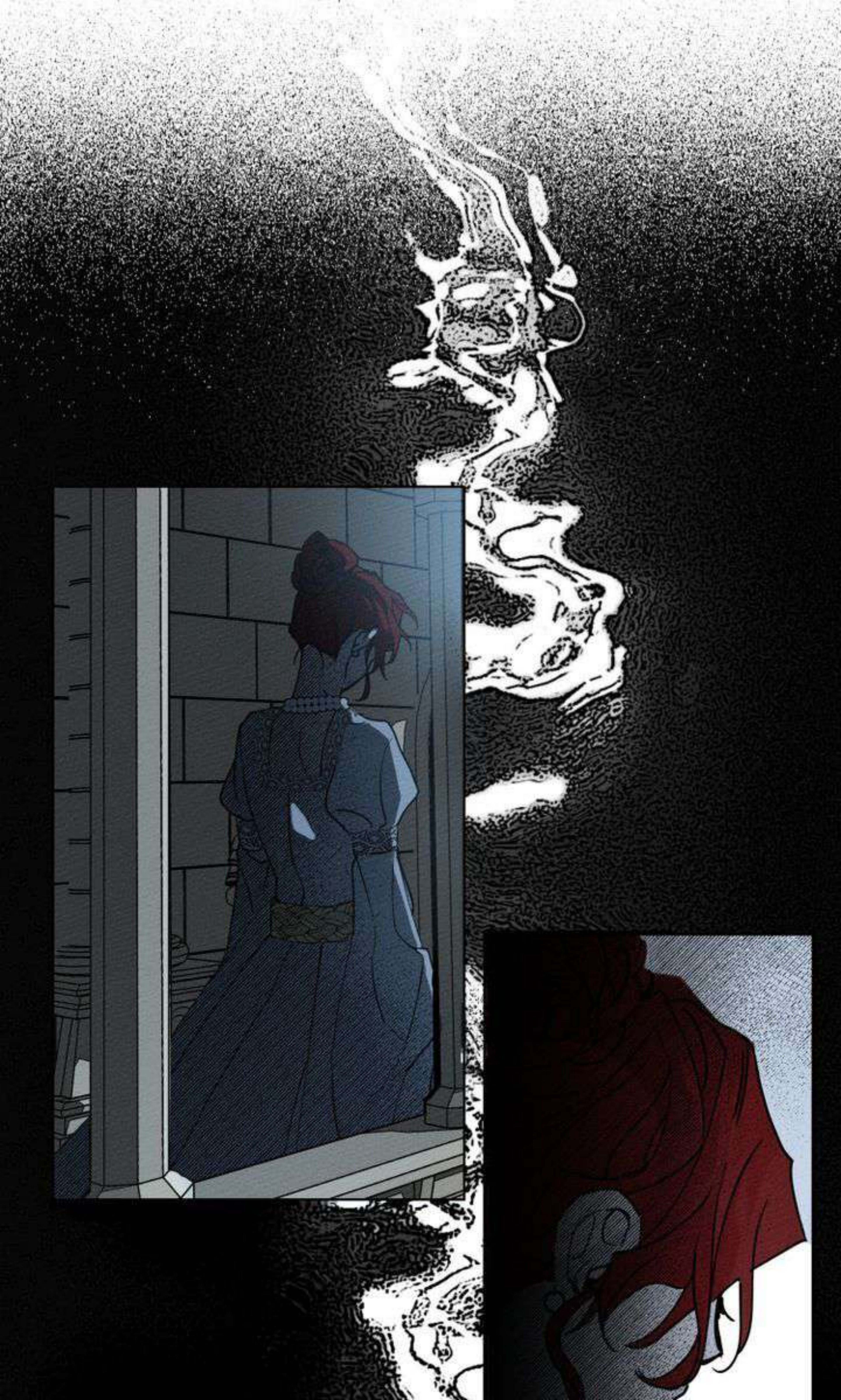
THAT LONG FACE OF YOURS IS THE REASON PEOPLE ARE GOSSIPING.

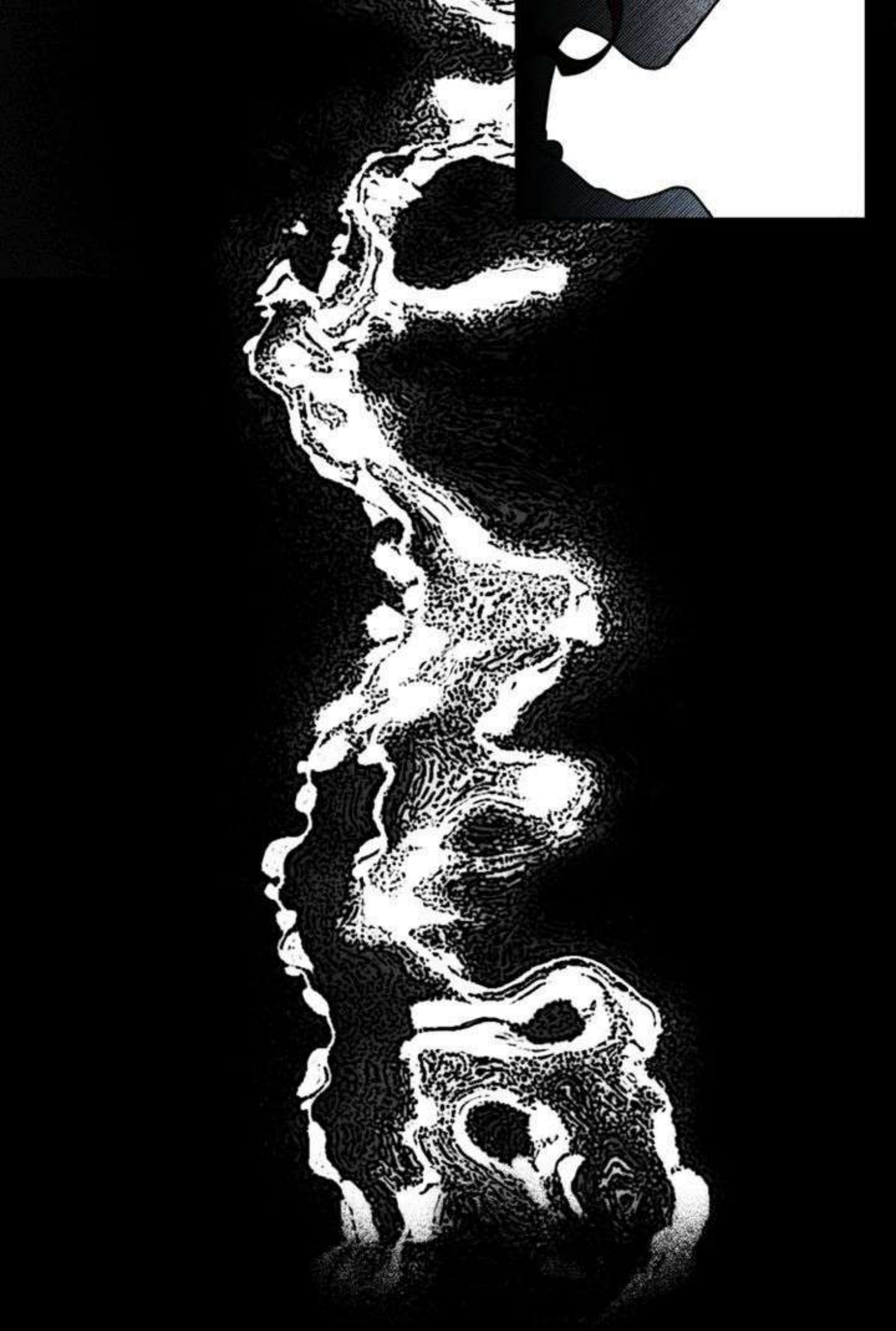

THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO PROVE YOUR WORTH. IF YOU MESS THIS UP,


YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH A LIGHT PUNISHMENT.



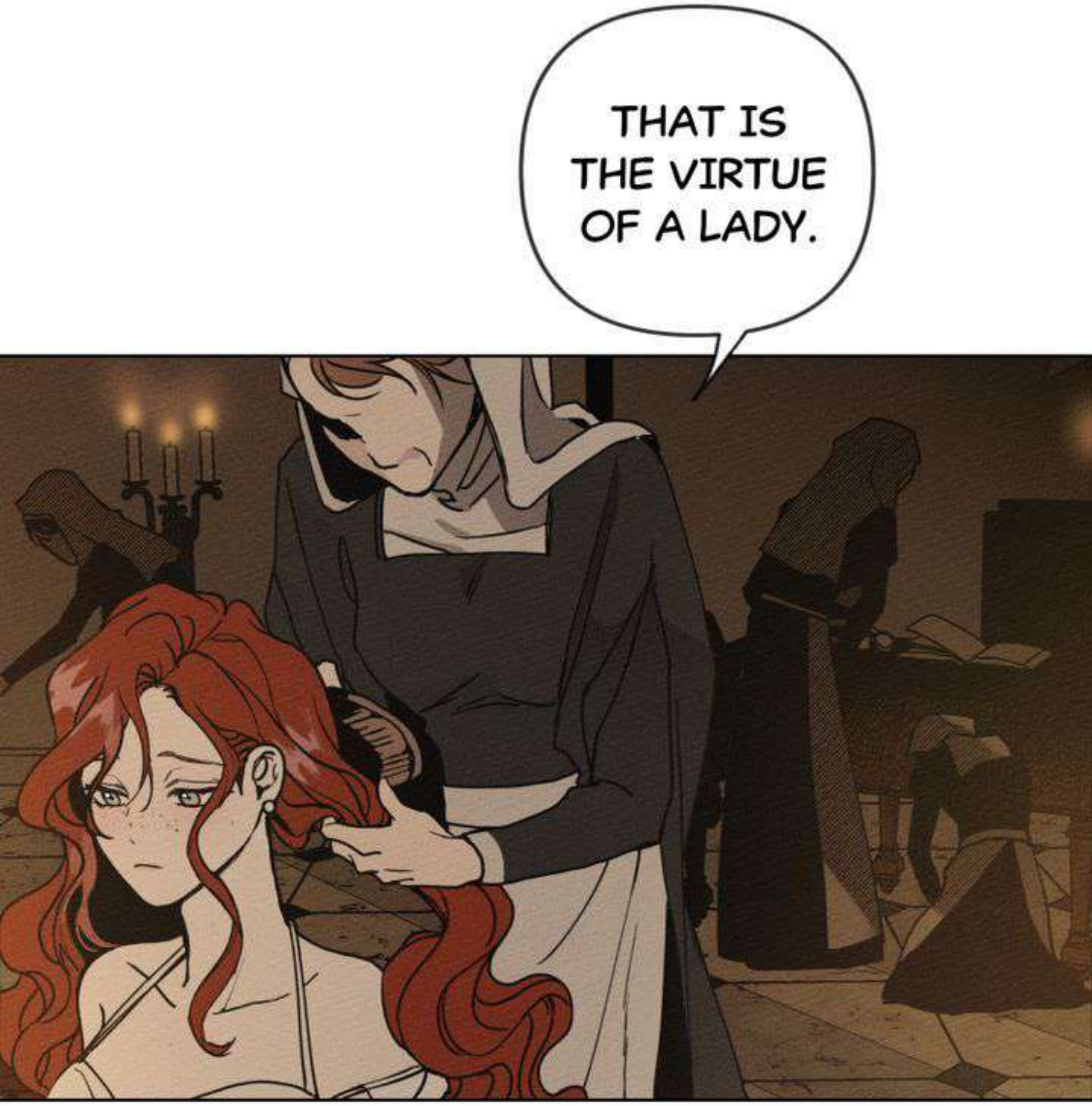
THE USELESS MAXIMILIAN.



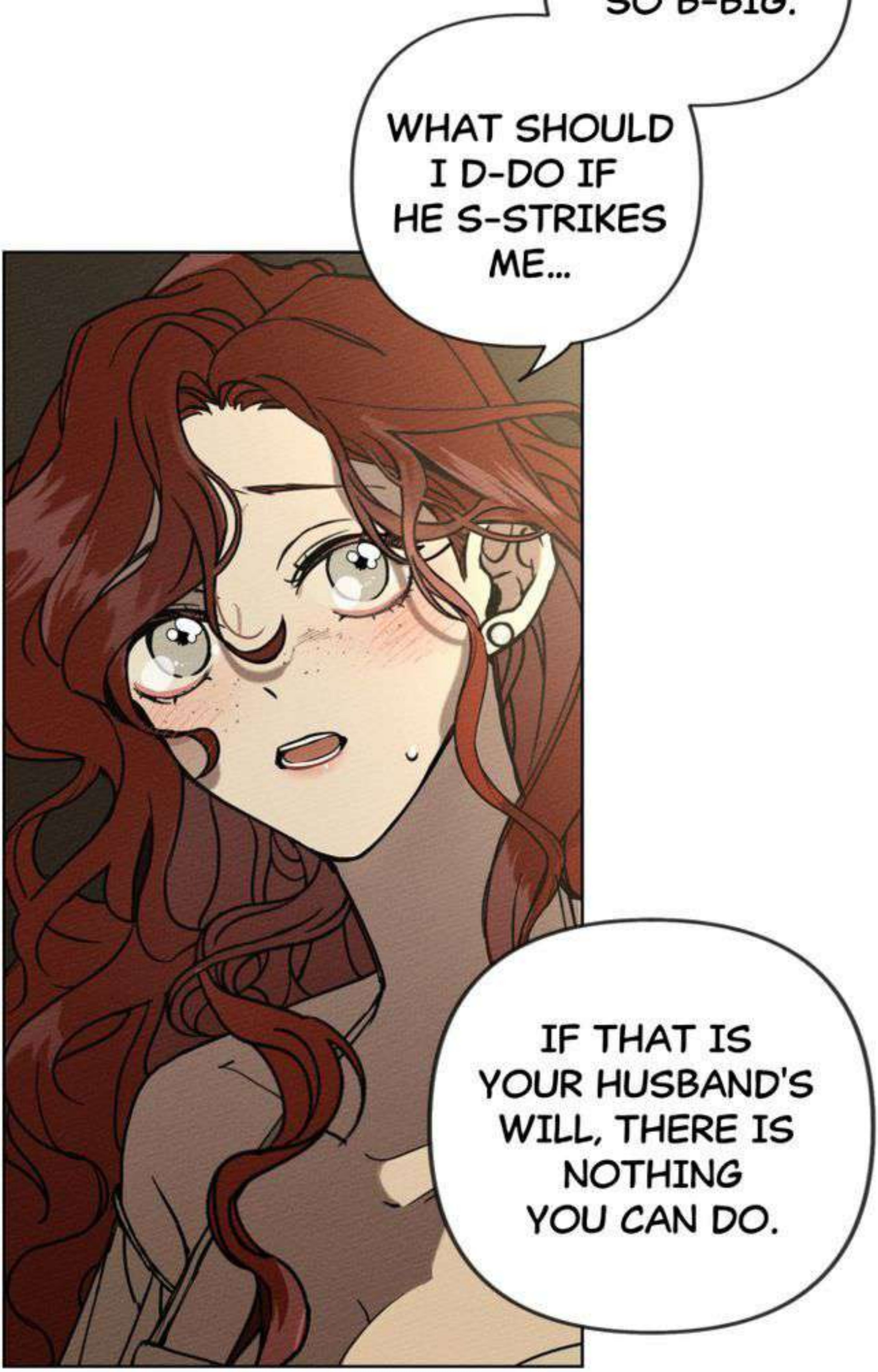


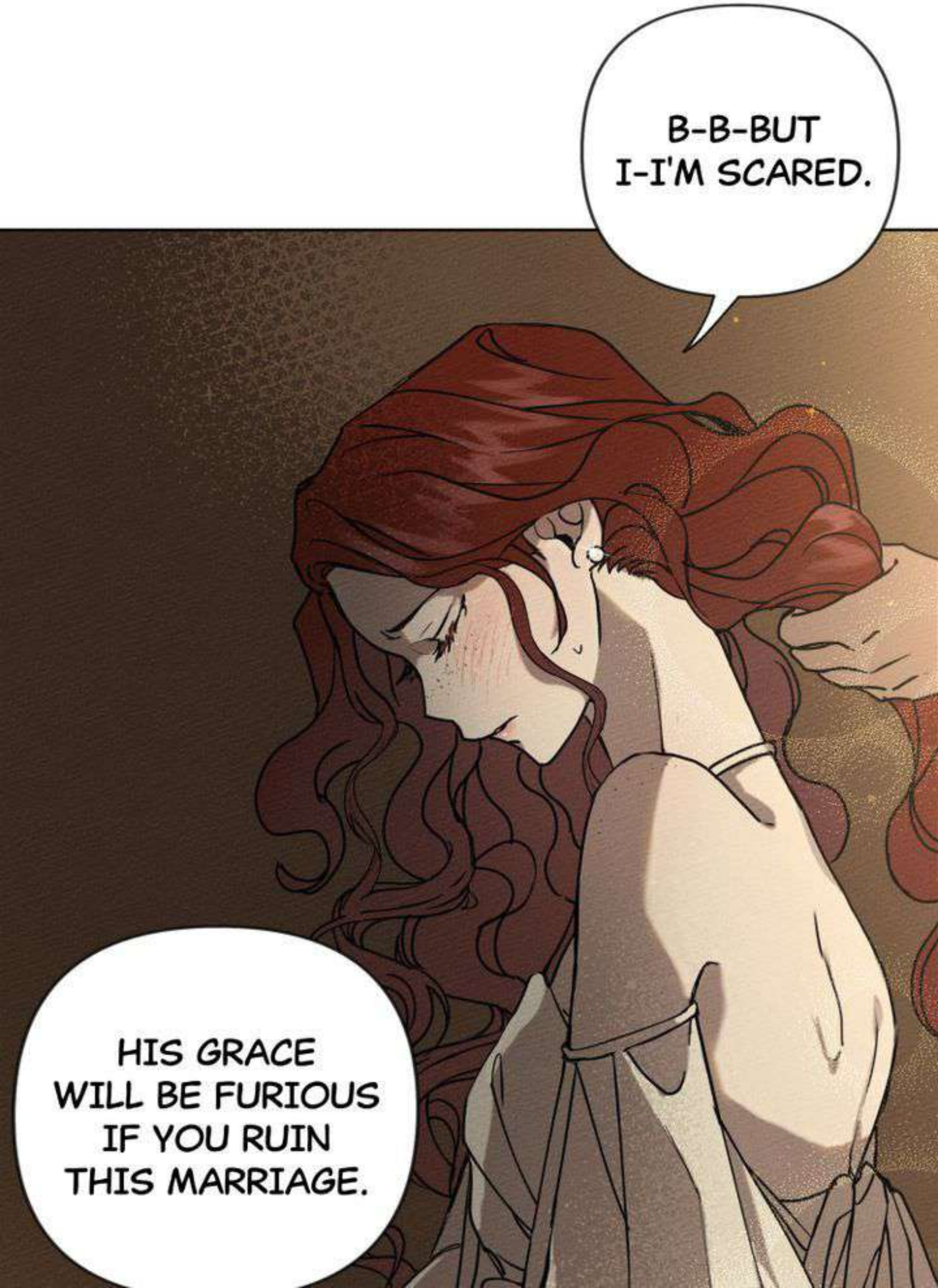
NO ONE WILL
EVER LOVE ME.

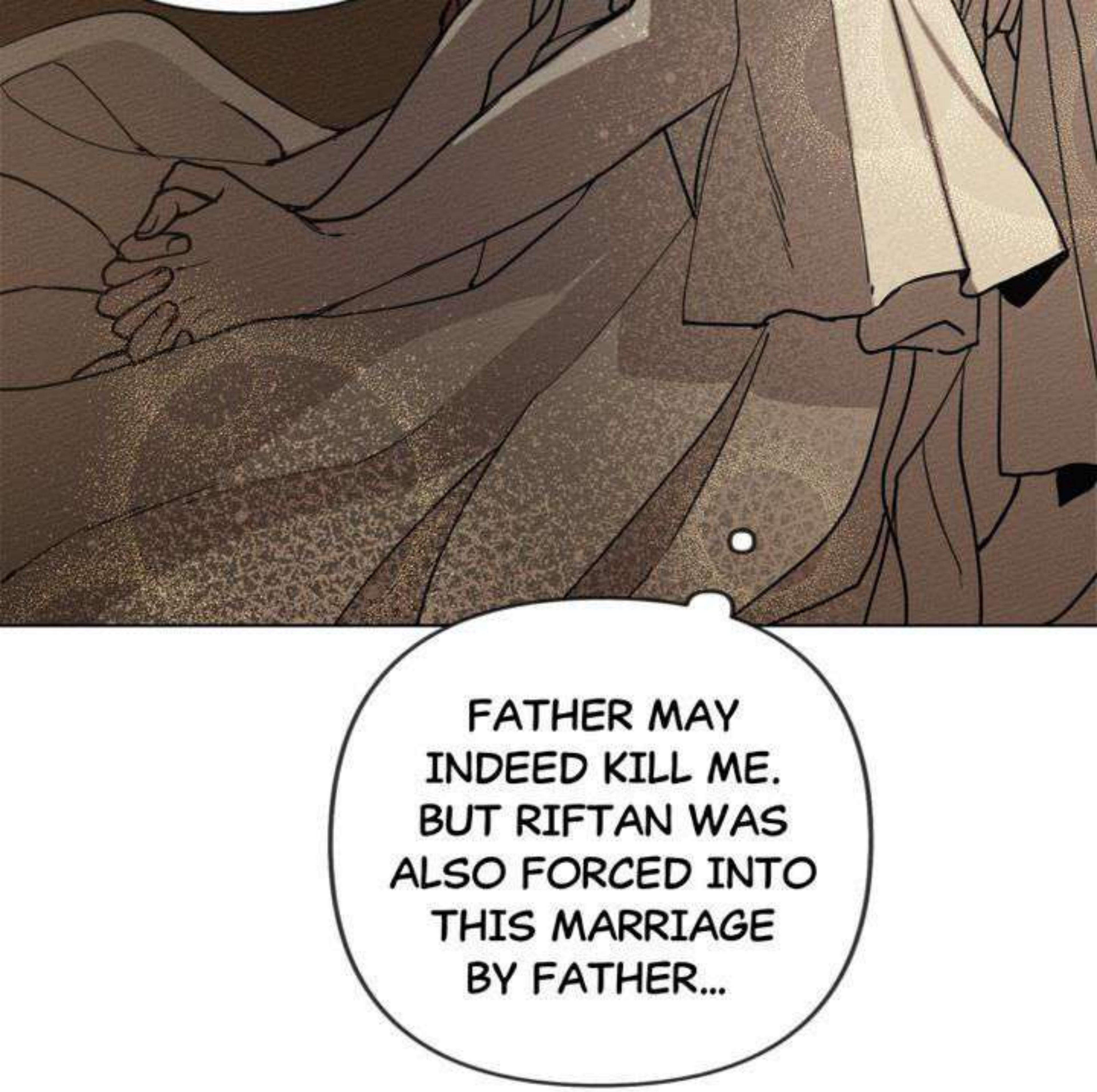
YOU MUST STAY AS STILL AS A CORPSE.


THAT IS THE VIRTUE OF A LADY.

H-H-HE WAS
SO B-BIG

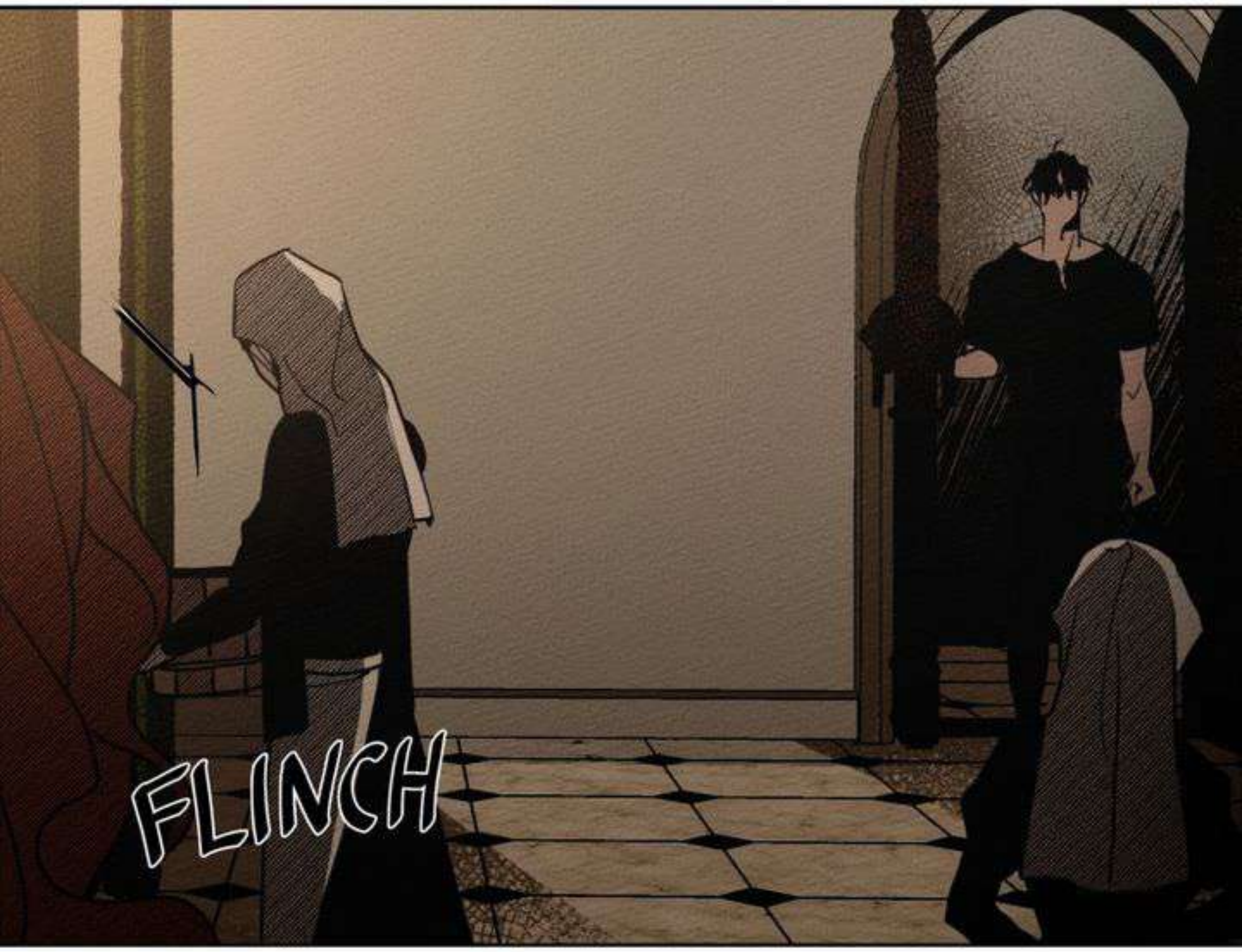

SO B-BIG.
WHAT SHOULD I D-DO IF HE S-STRIKES ME...
IF THAT IS YOUR HUSBAND'S WILL, THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO.


B-B-BUT I-I'M SCARED.
HIS GRACE WILL BE FURIOUS IF YOU RUIN THIS MARRIAGE.


FATHER MAY INDEED KILL ME. BUT RIFTAN WAS ALSO FORCED INTO THIS MARRIAGE BY FATHER...

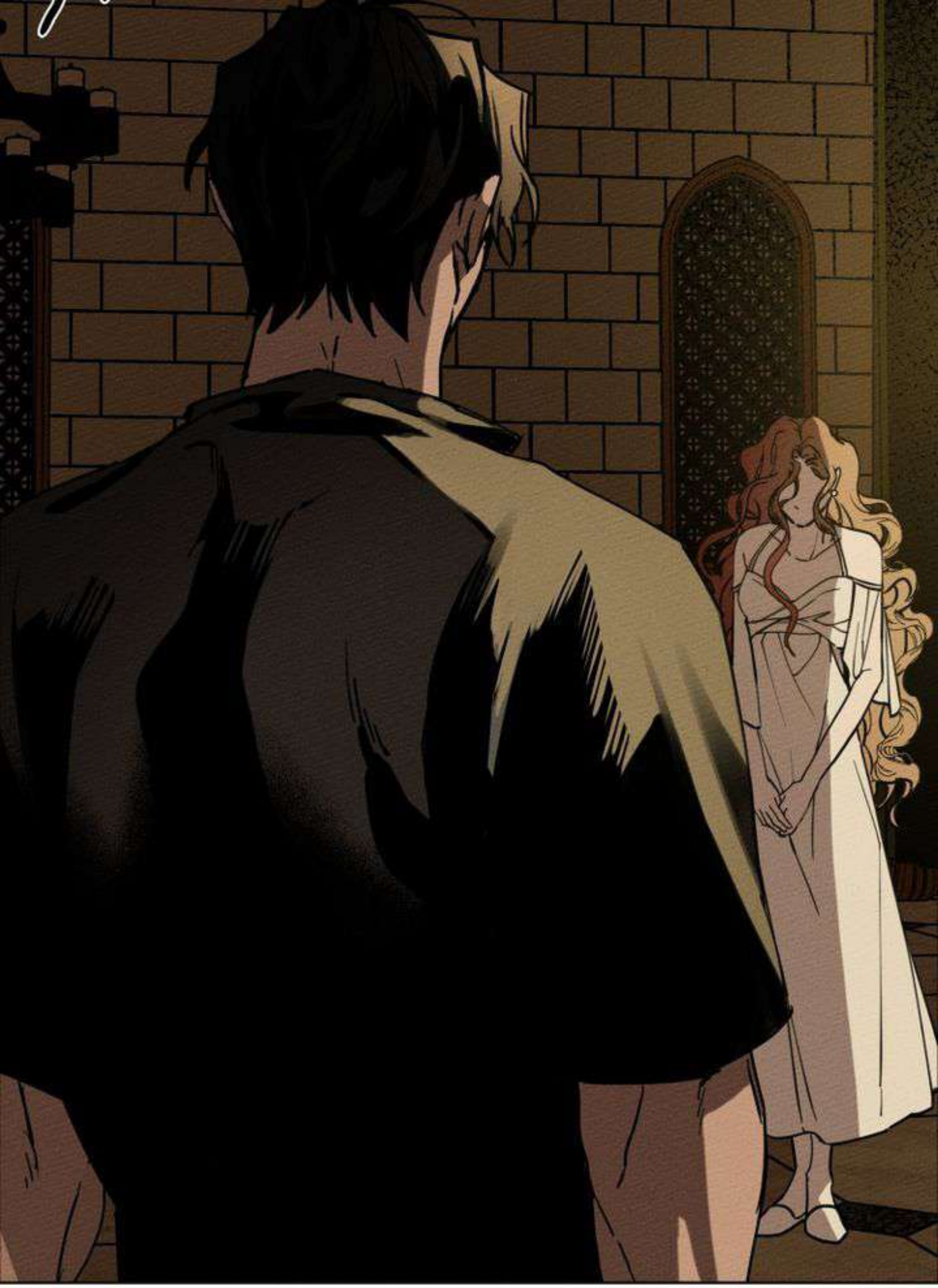
CR

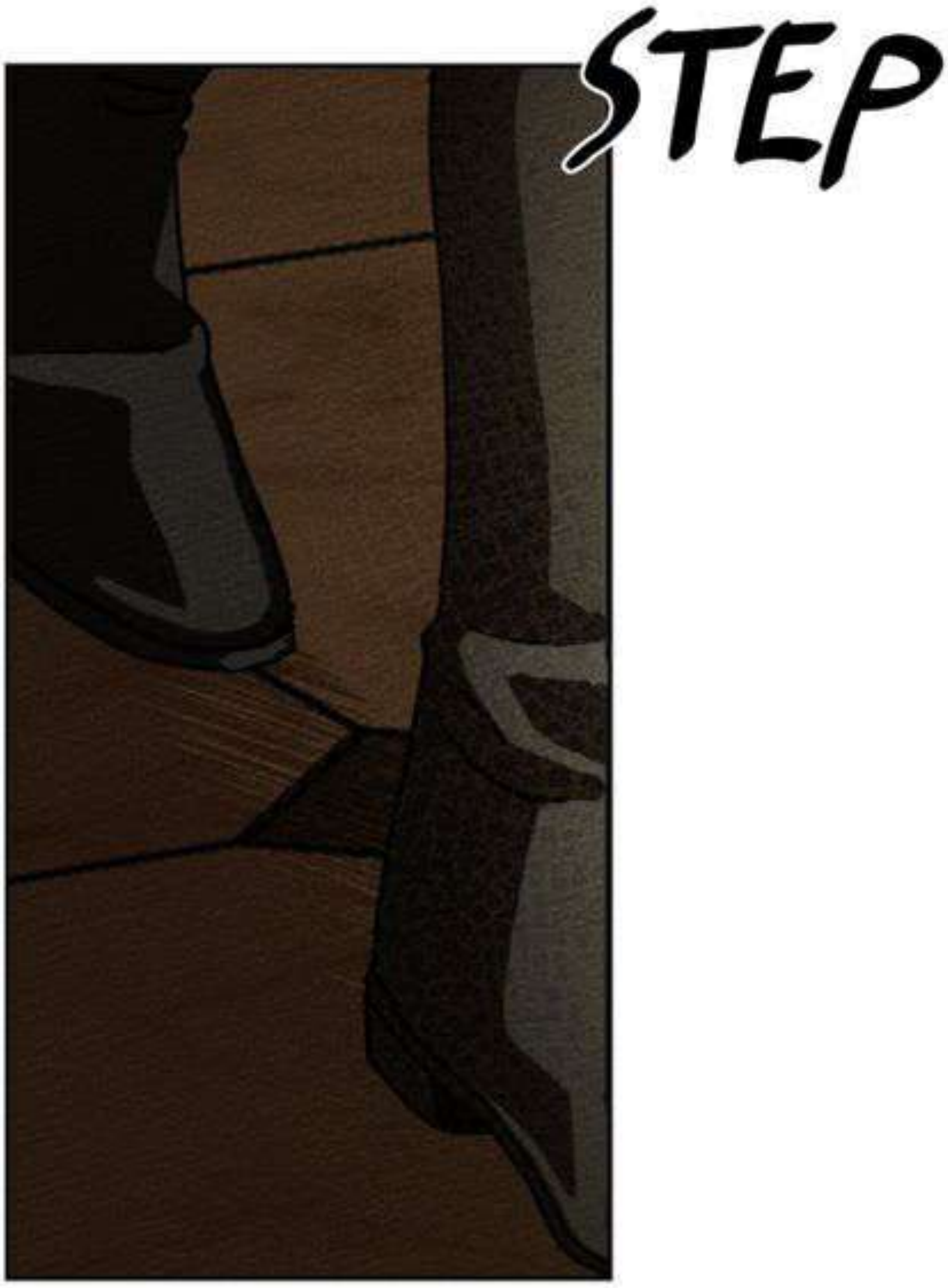
EAK..

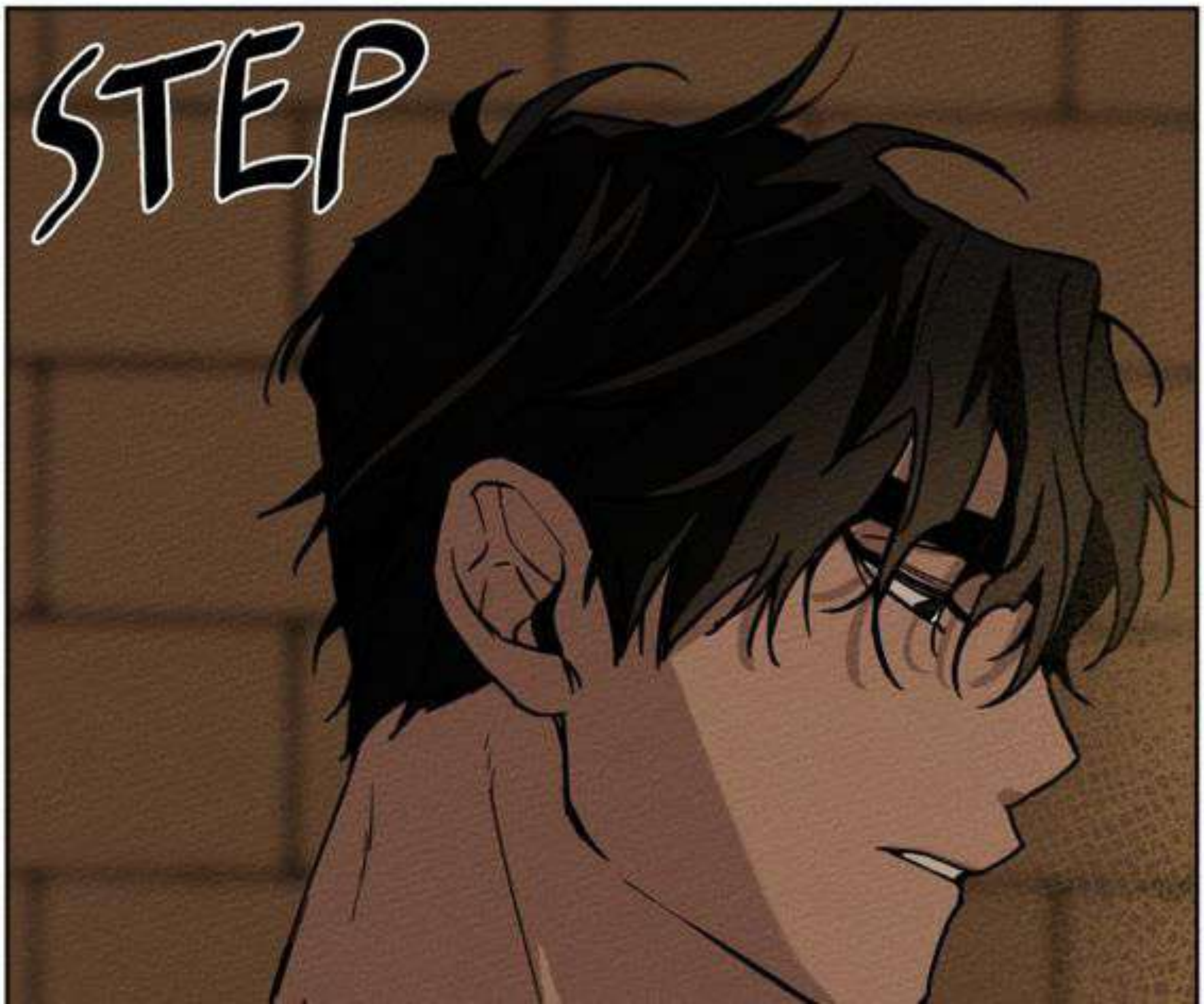

FLINCH

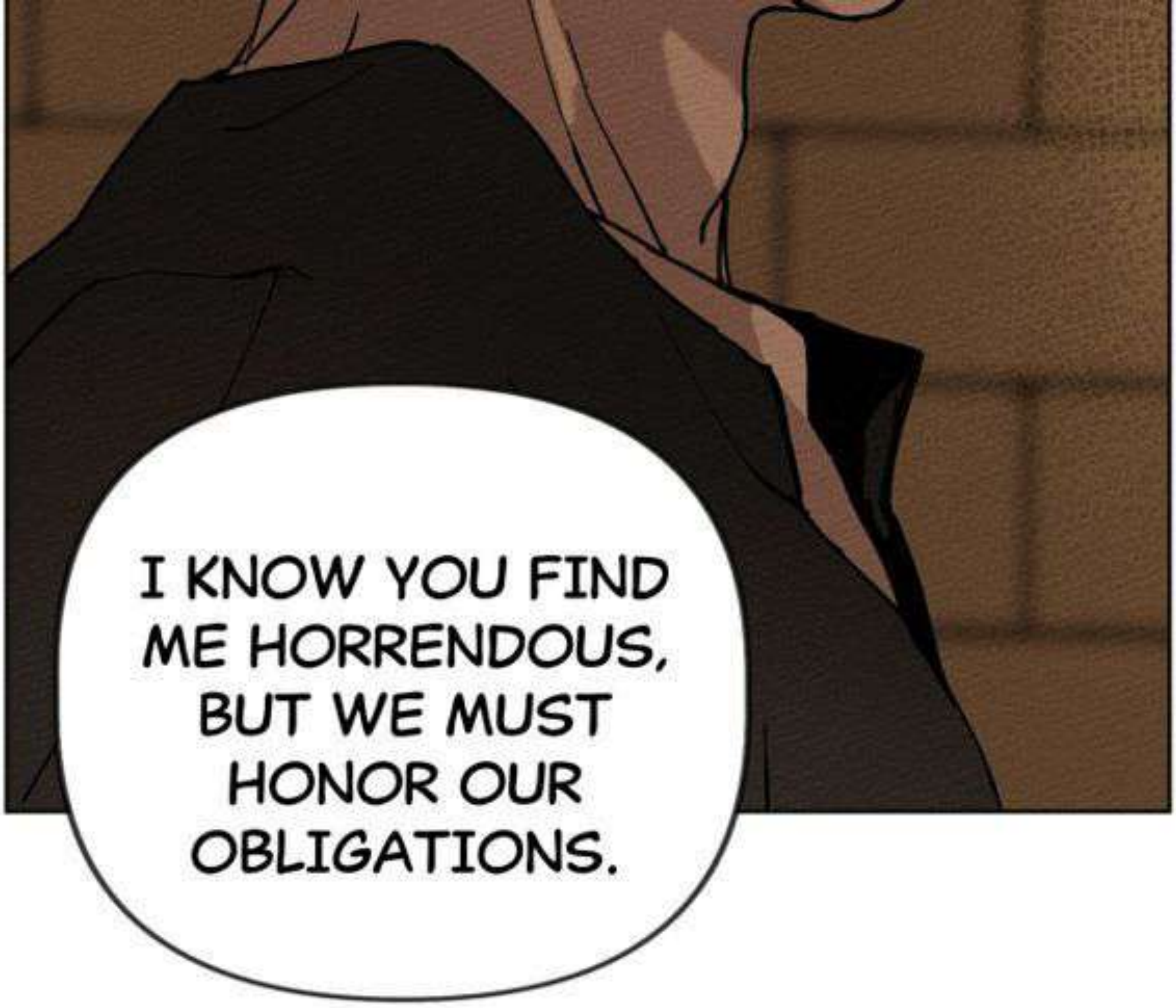
WHOOSH

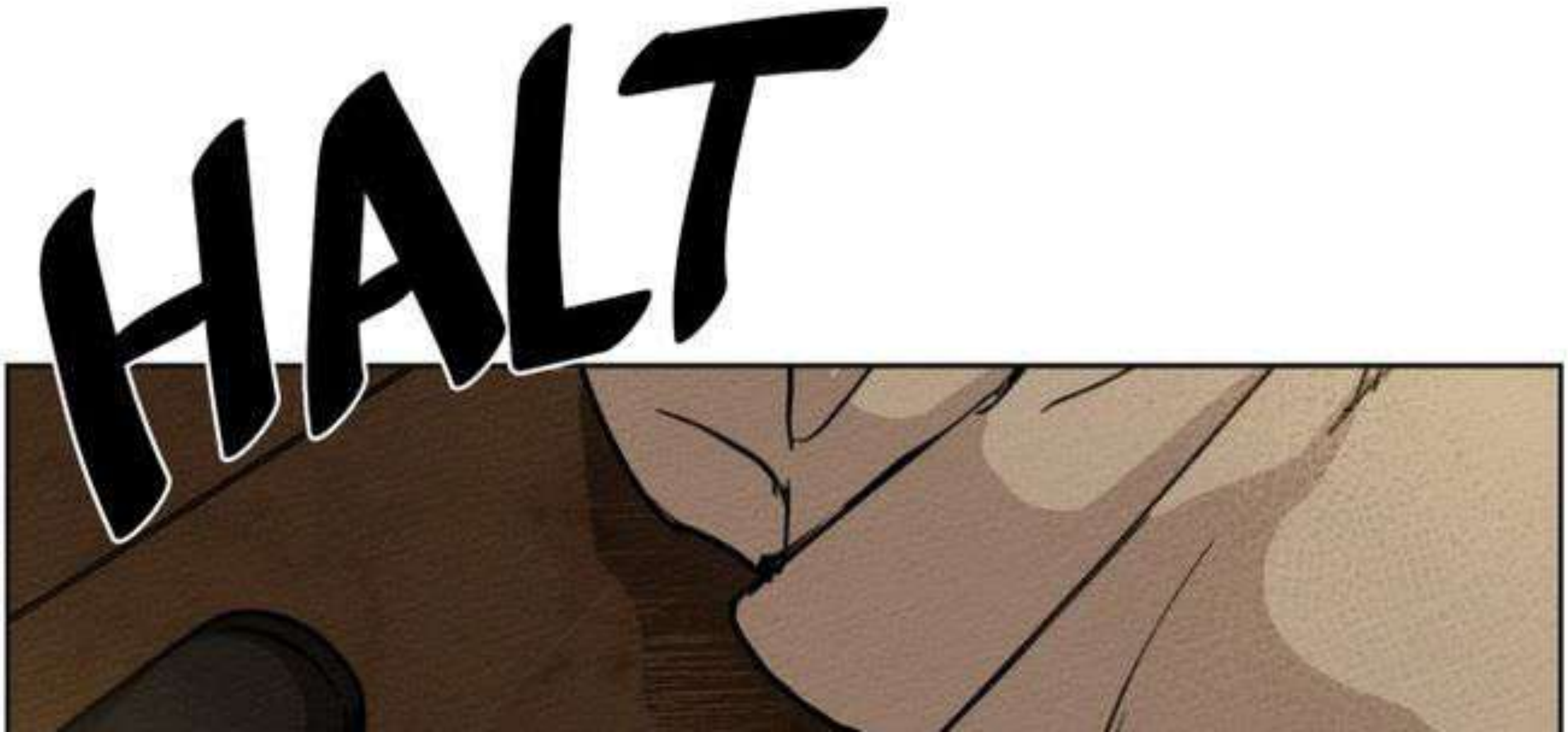
STEP

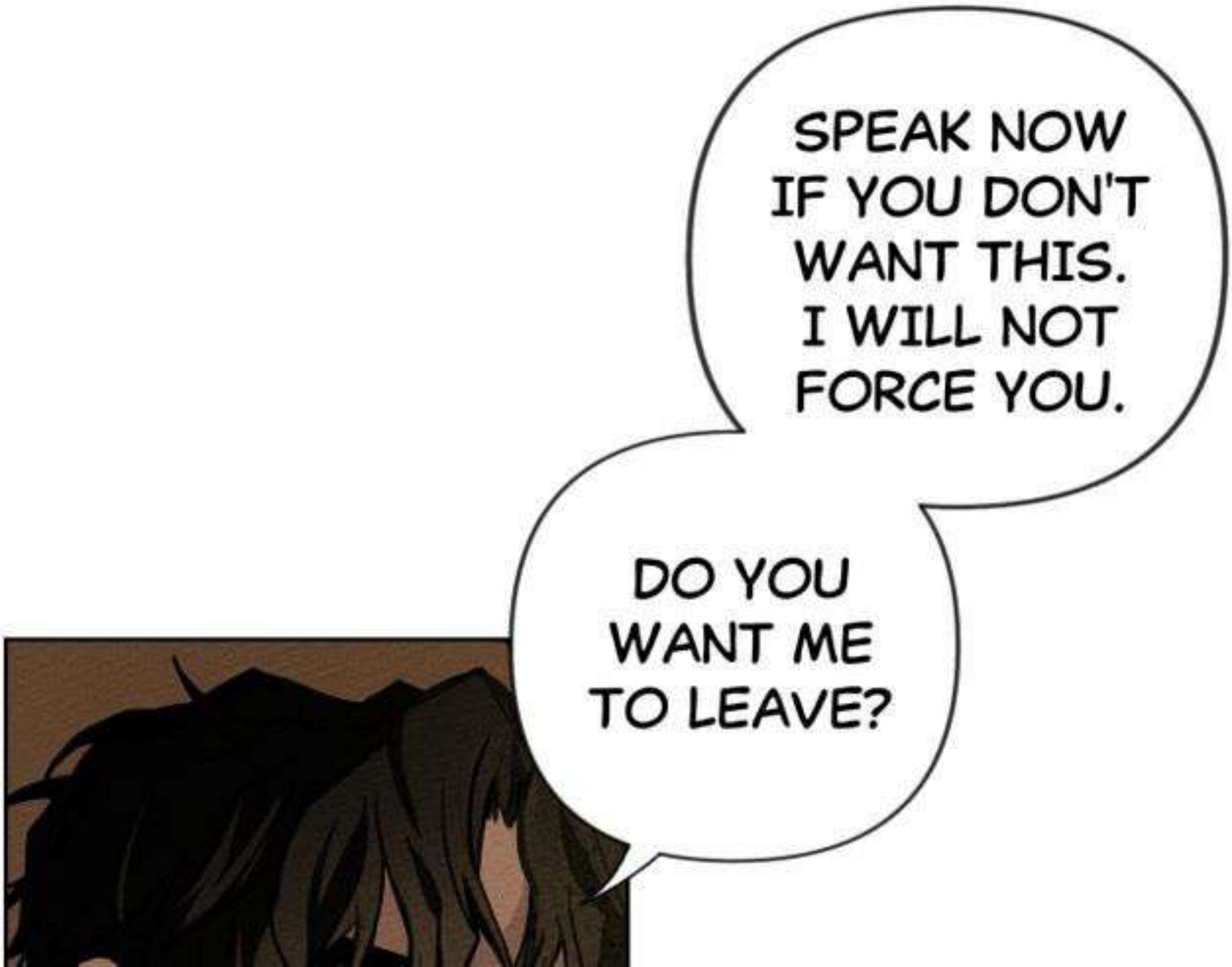


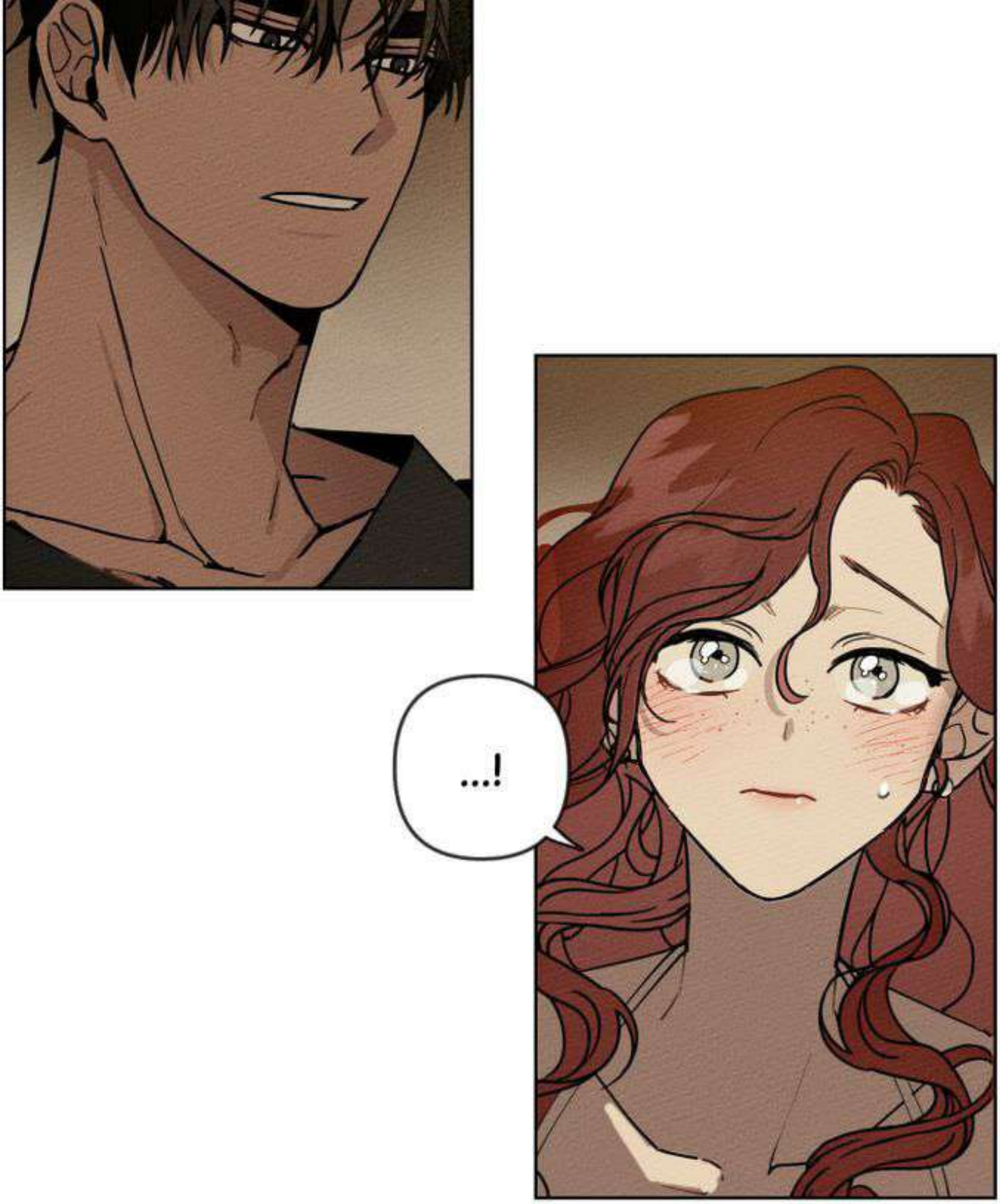

STEP

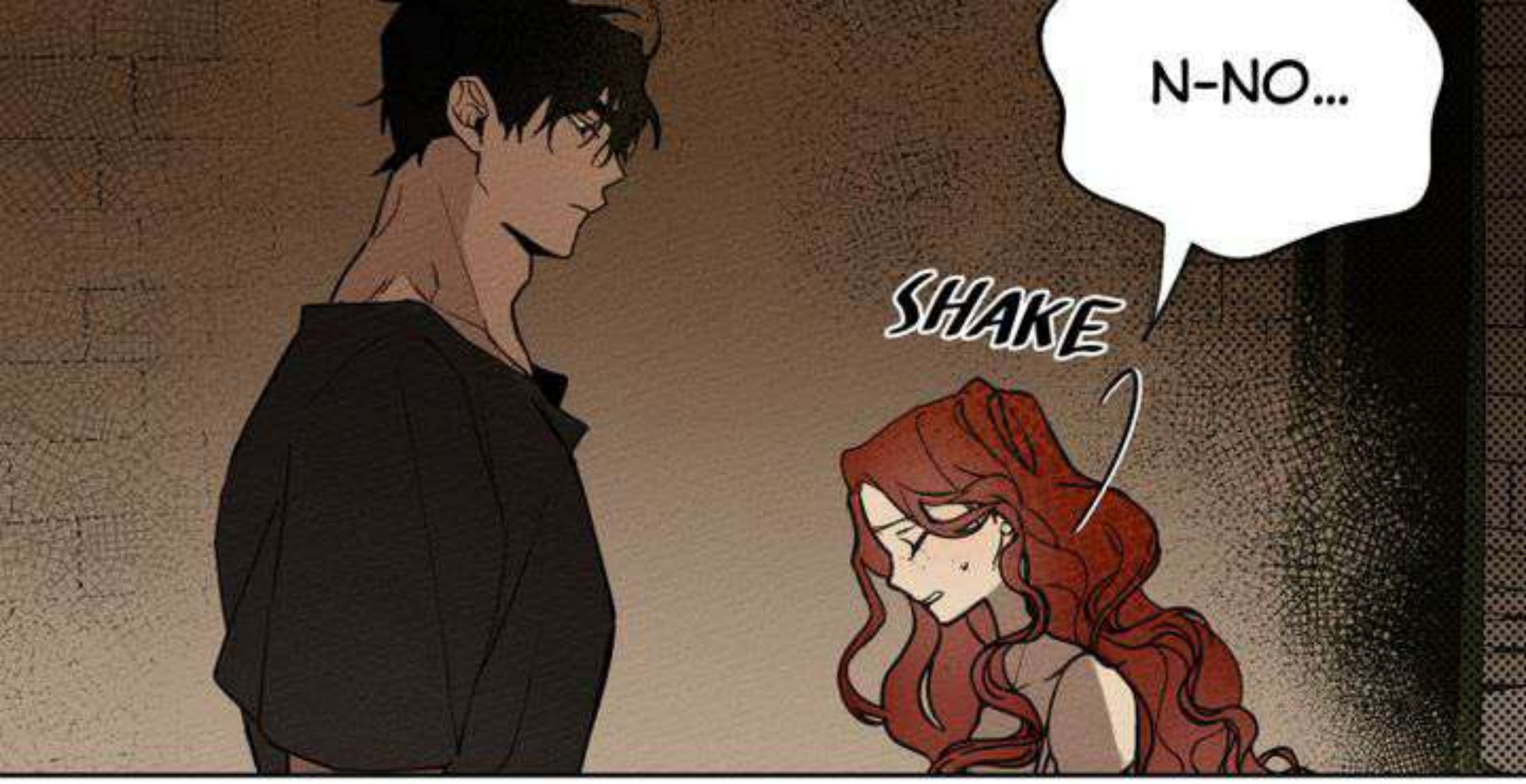

STEP

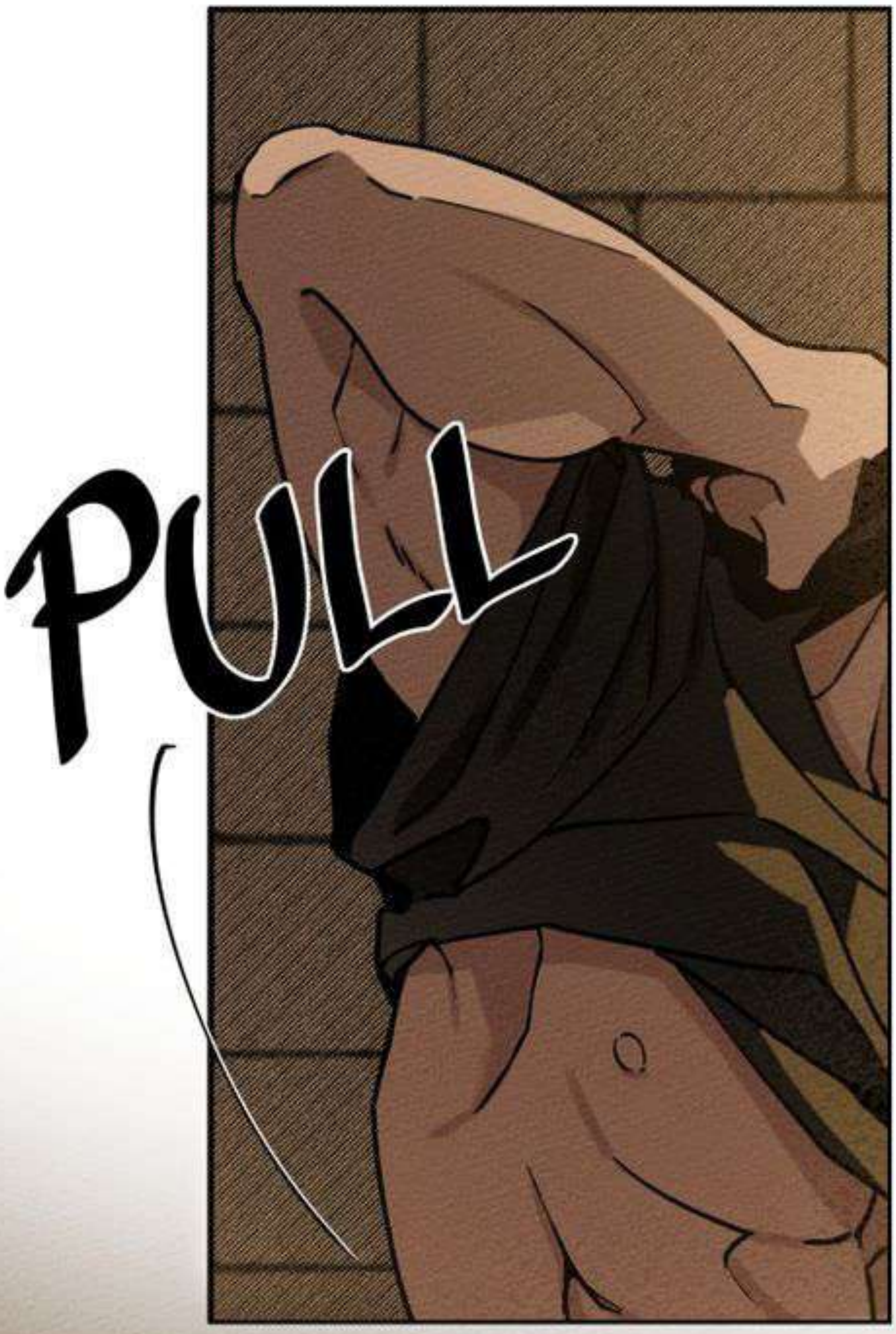

I KNOW YOU FIND ME HORRENDOUS, BUT WE MUST HONOR OUR OBLIGATIONS.

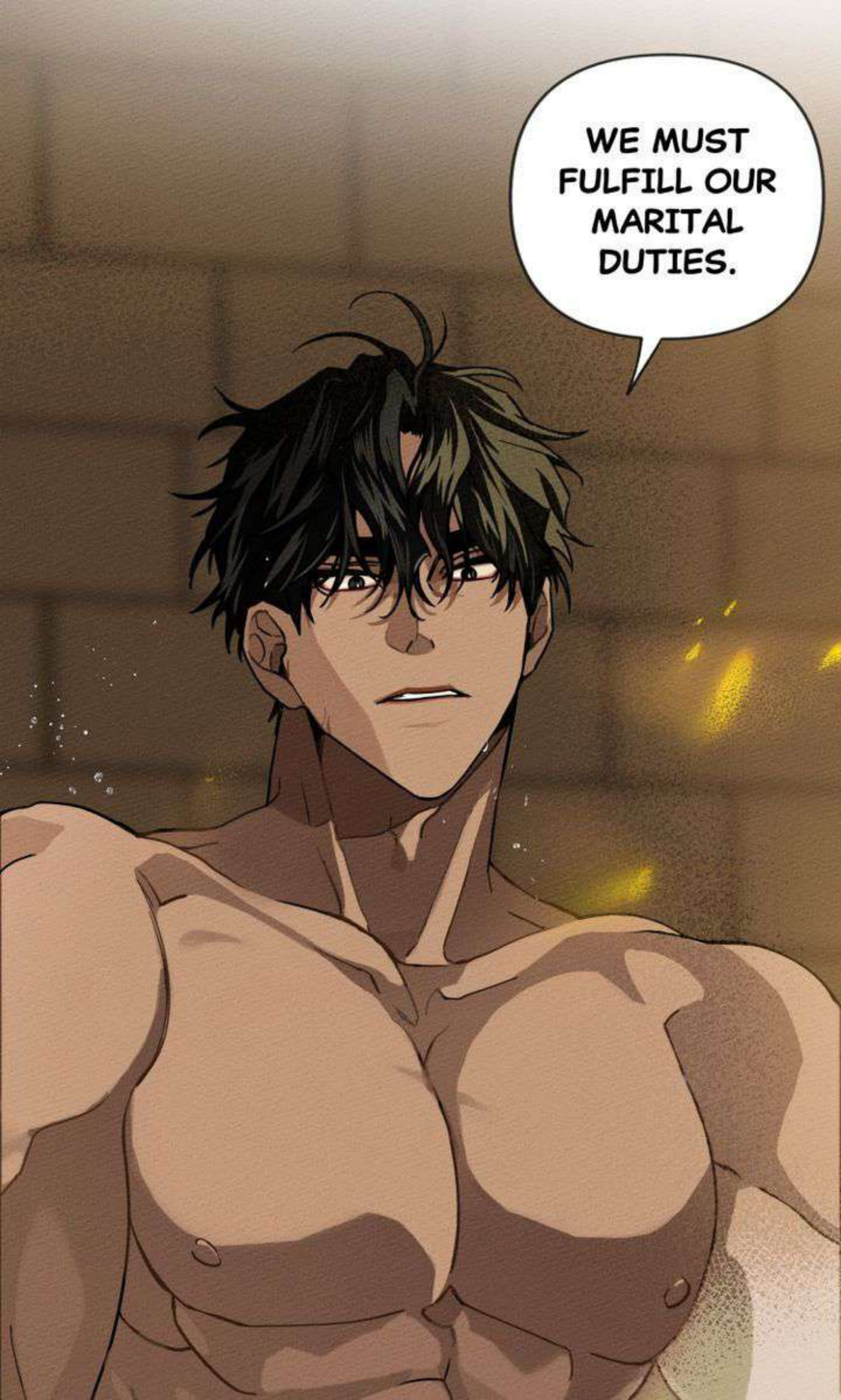

HALT


SPEAK NOW IF YOU DON'T WANT THIS. I WILL NOT FORCE YOU.
DO YOU WANT ME TO LEAVE?




N-NO...
SHAKE


PULL


WE MUST FULFILL OUR MARITAL DUTIES.

ASSISTANCE INTOL
K_Din
Yemin

PRODUCTION SUPPORT orangetrack

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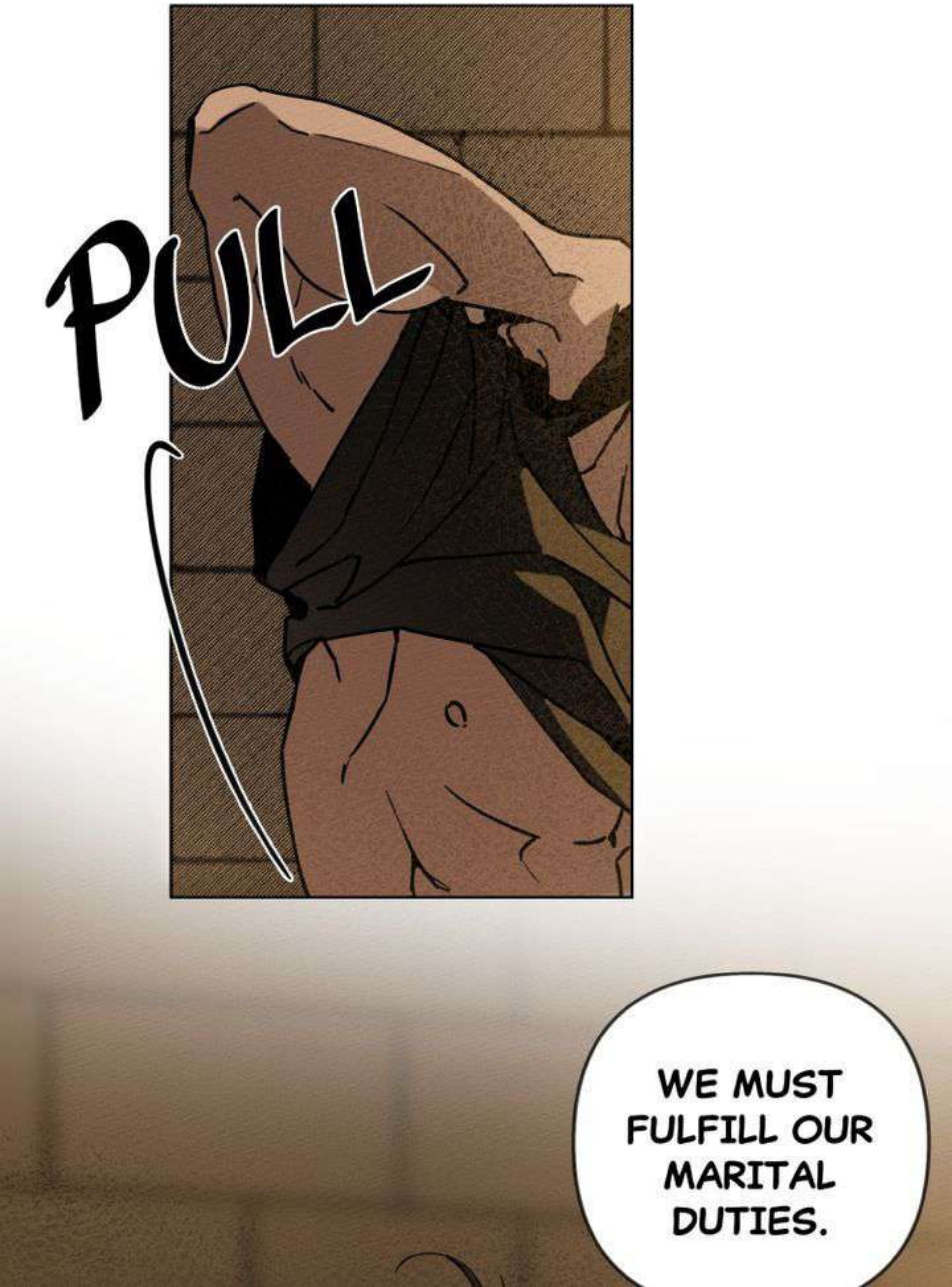
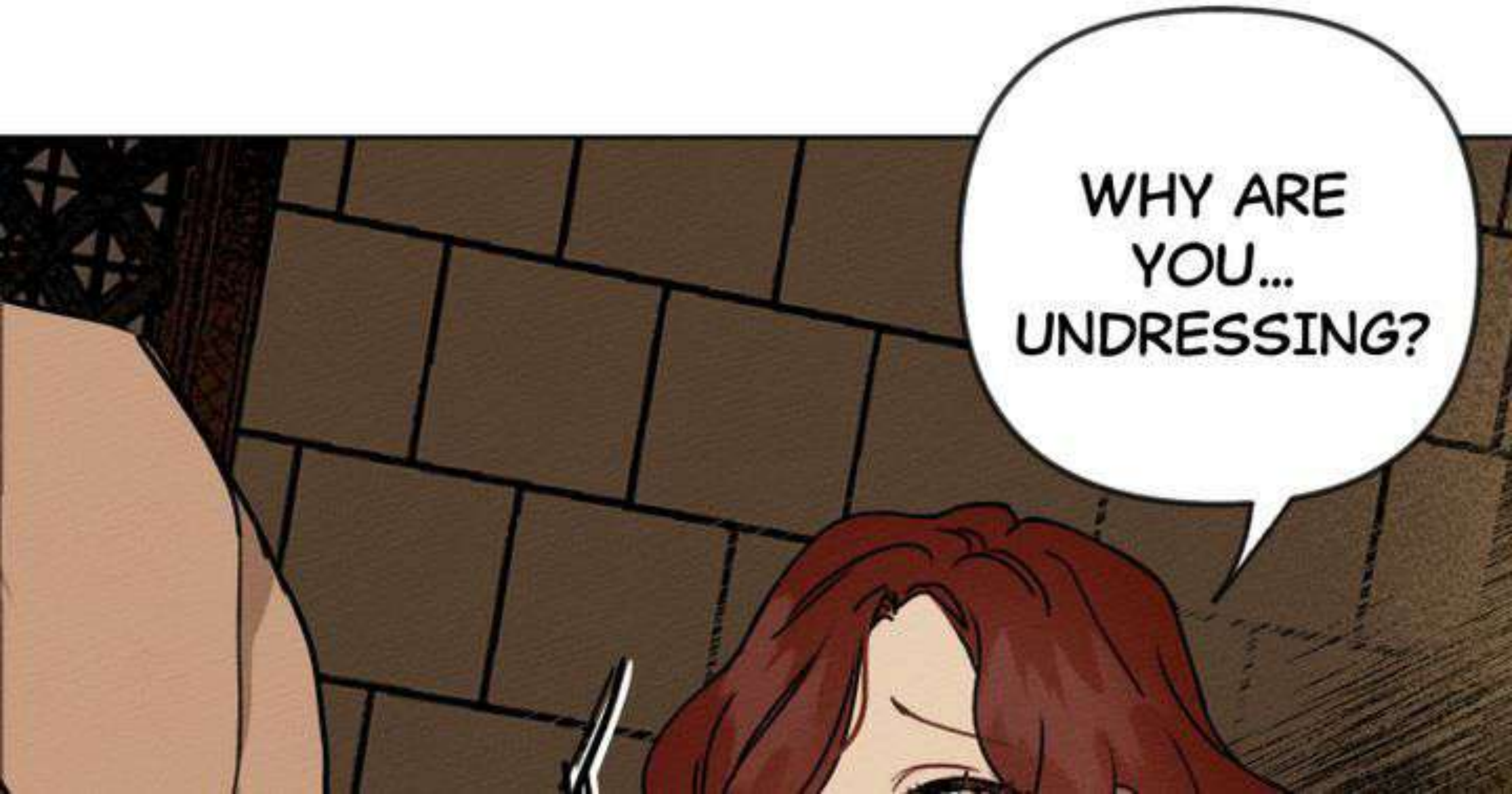
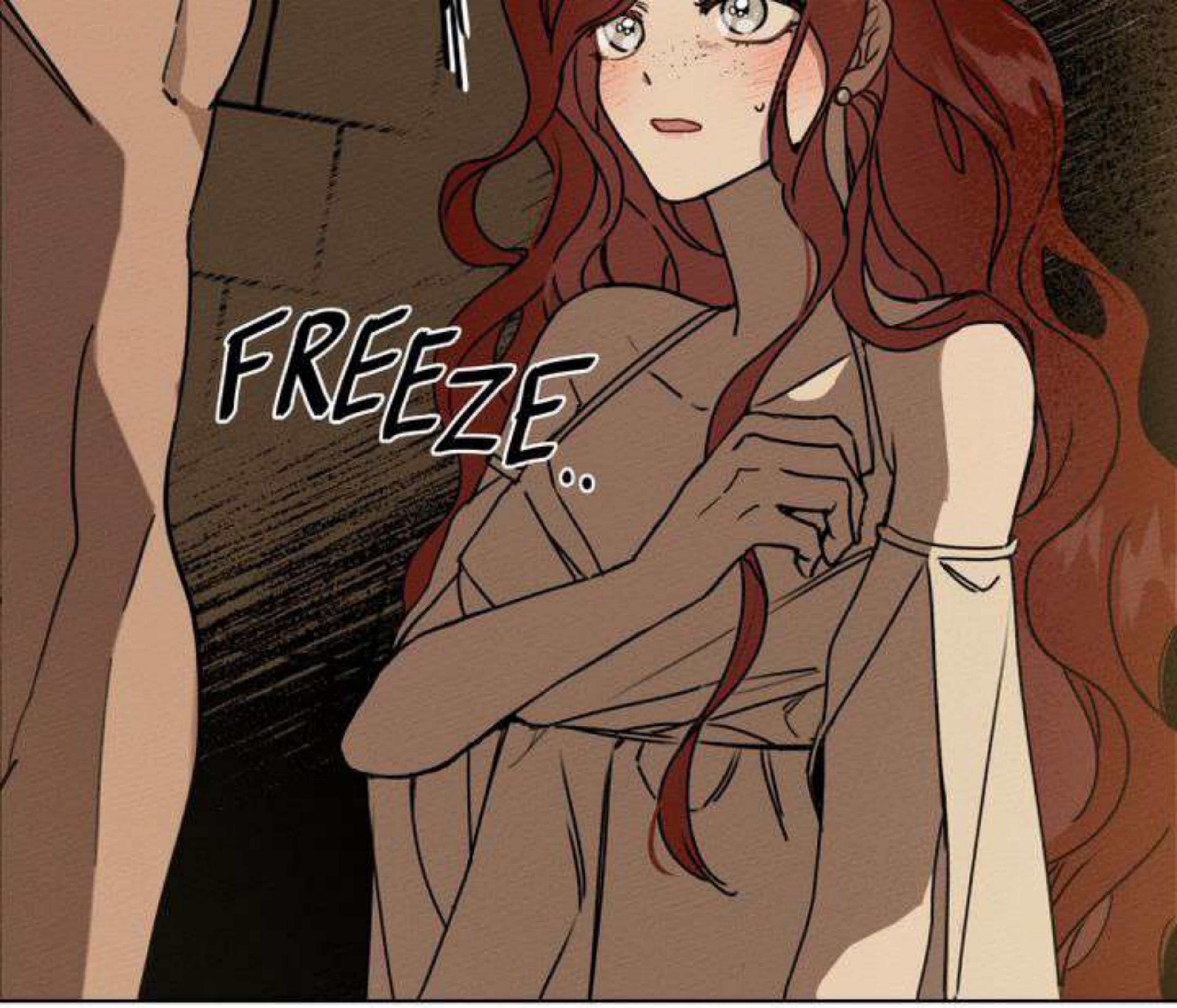

PULL
WE MUST FULFILL OUR MARITAL DUTIES.

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

2

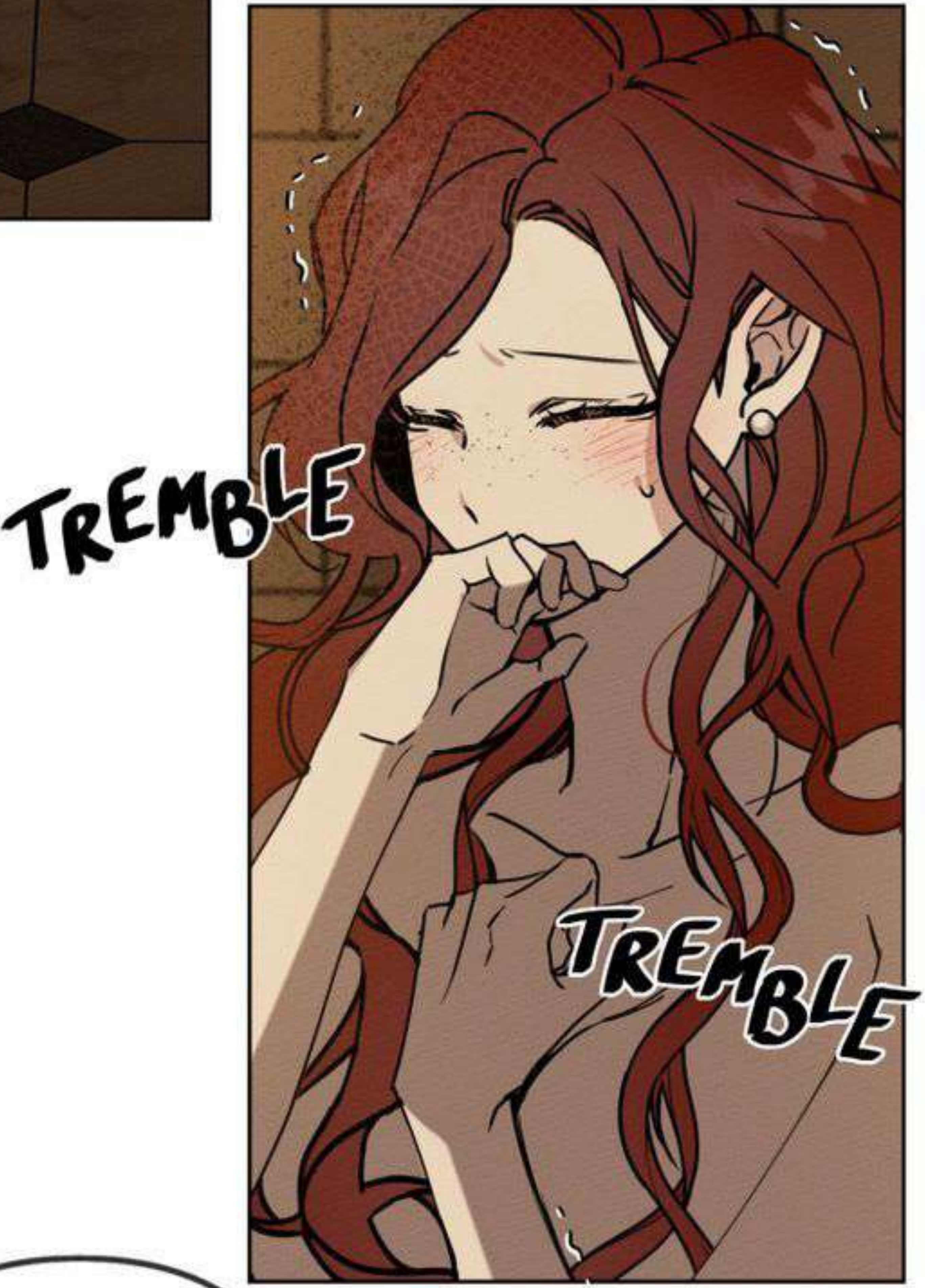

WHY ARE YOU... UNDRESSING?

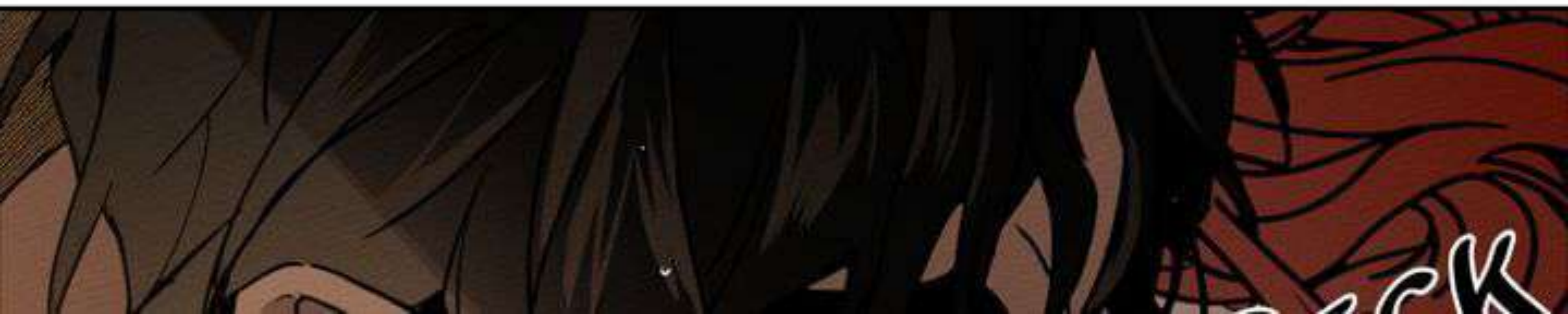

FREEZE..

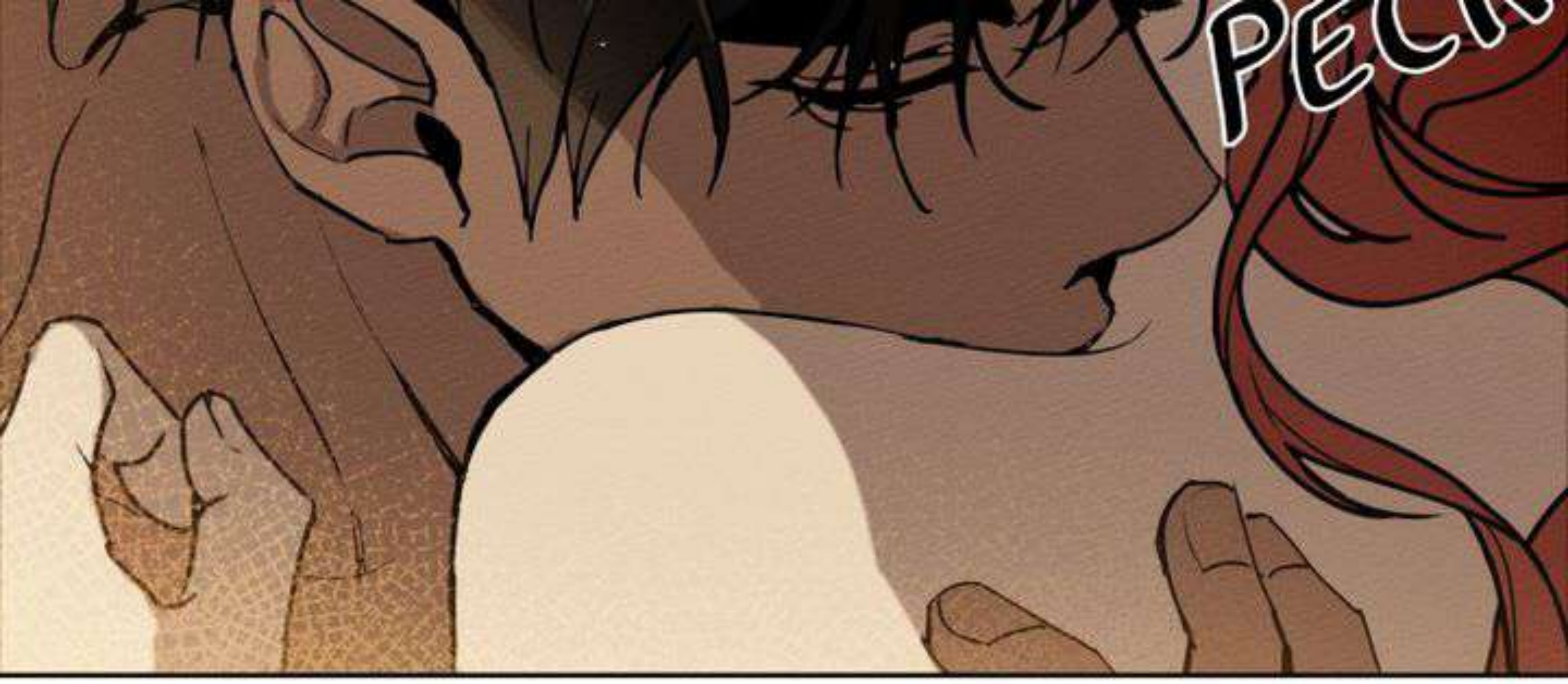
DO YOU WANT ME TO LEAVE?

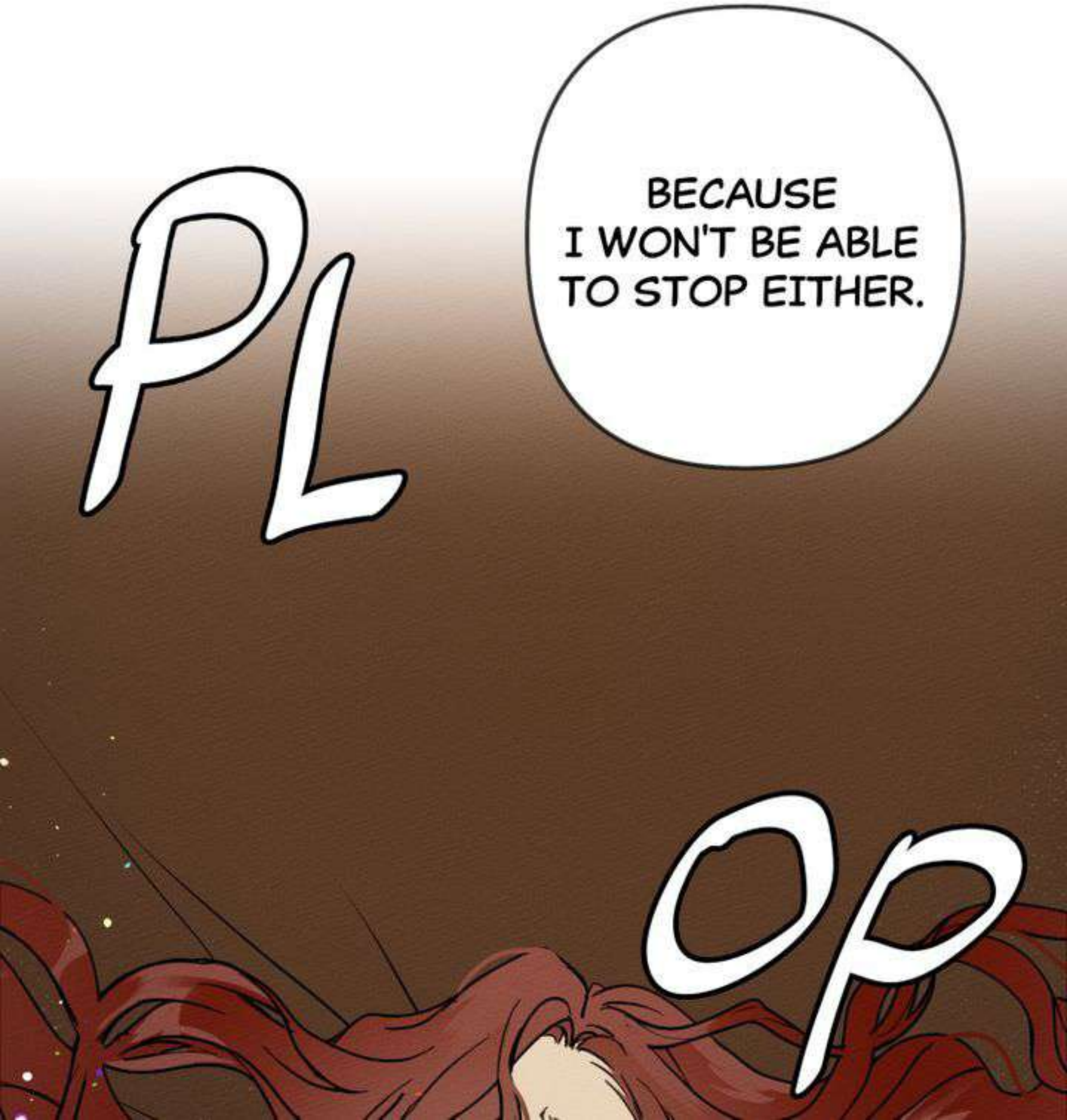
FLINCH

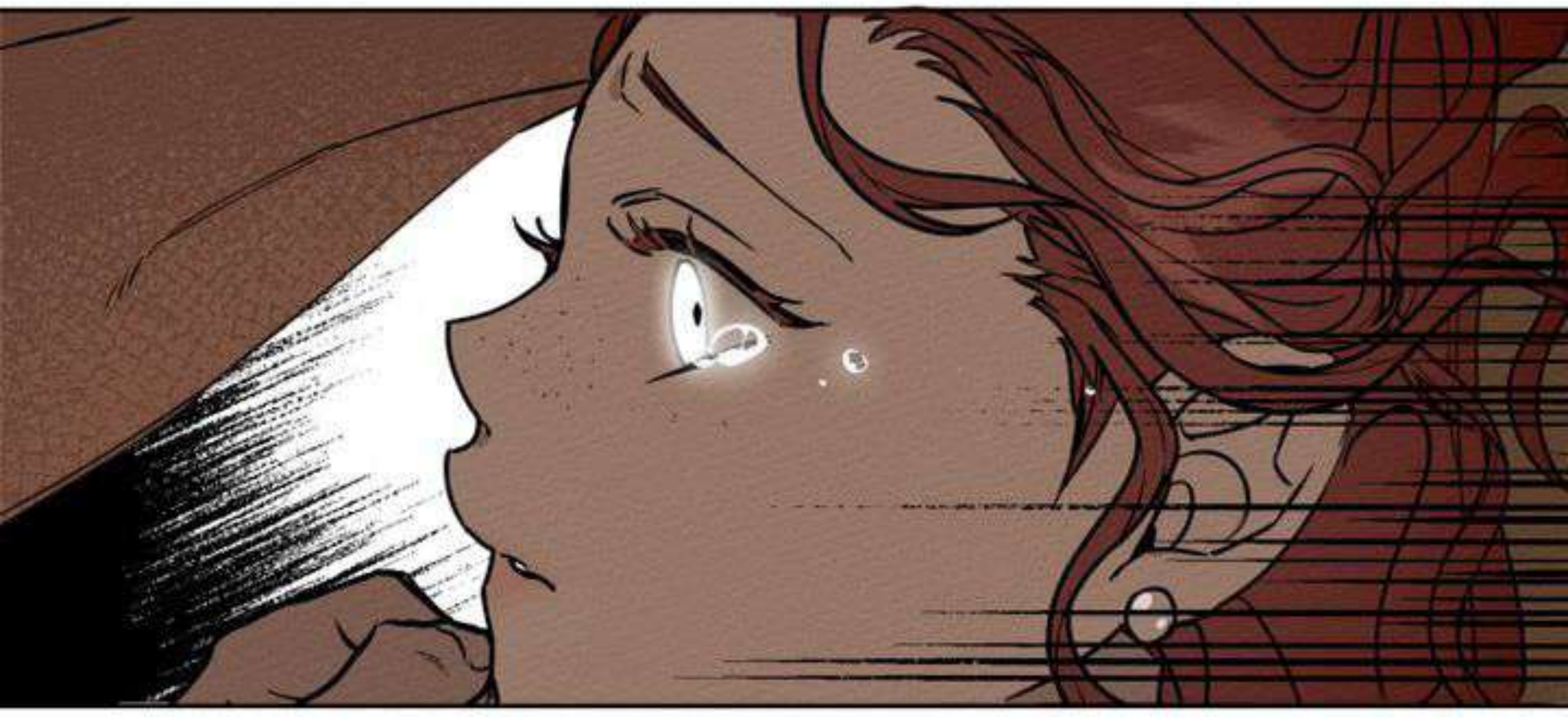
N-NO...
SLIP..


TREMBLE
TREMBLE
JUST BEAR IT... EVEN IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.

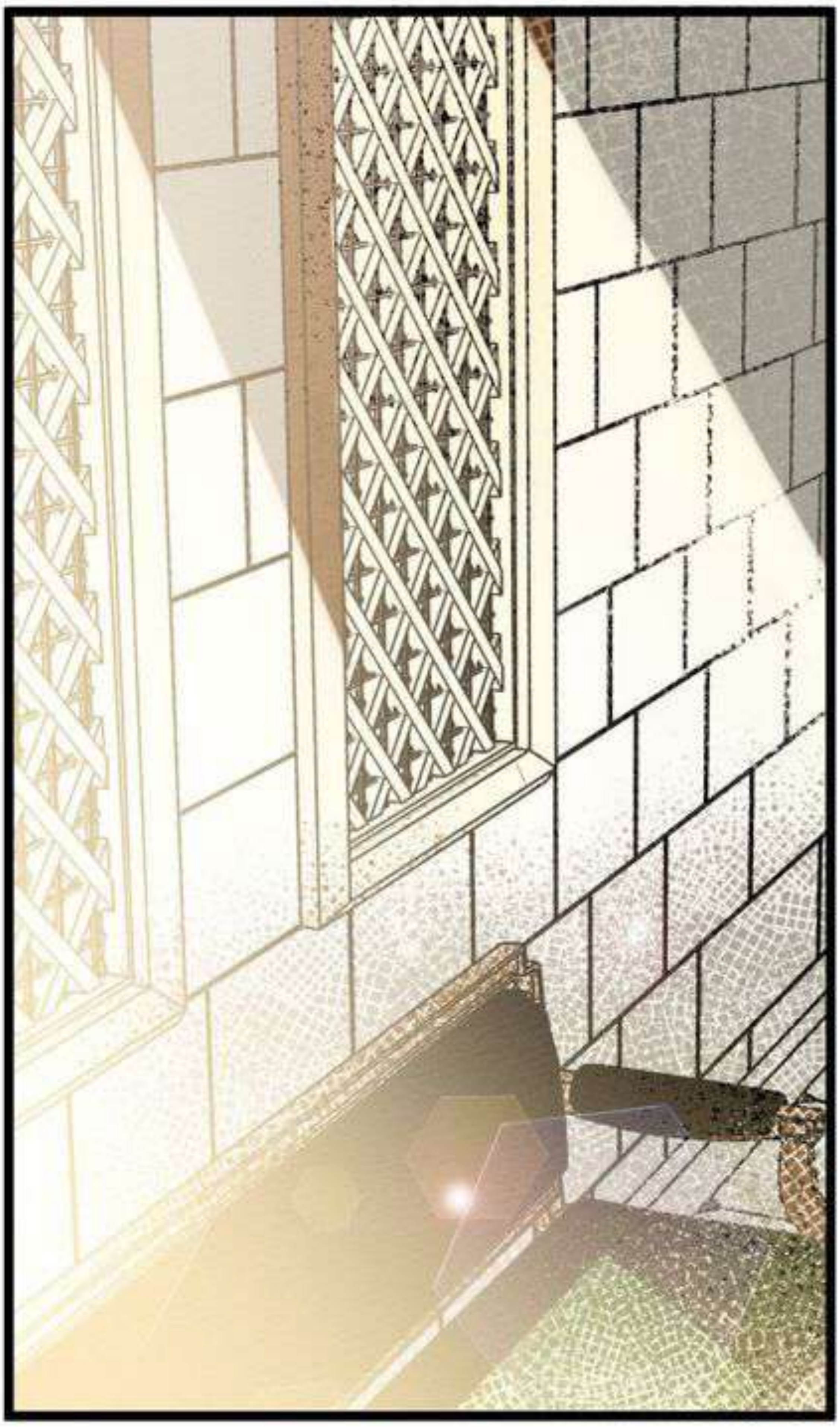


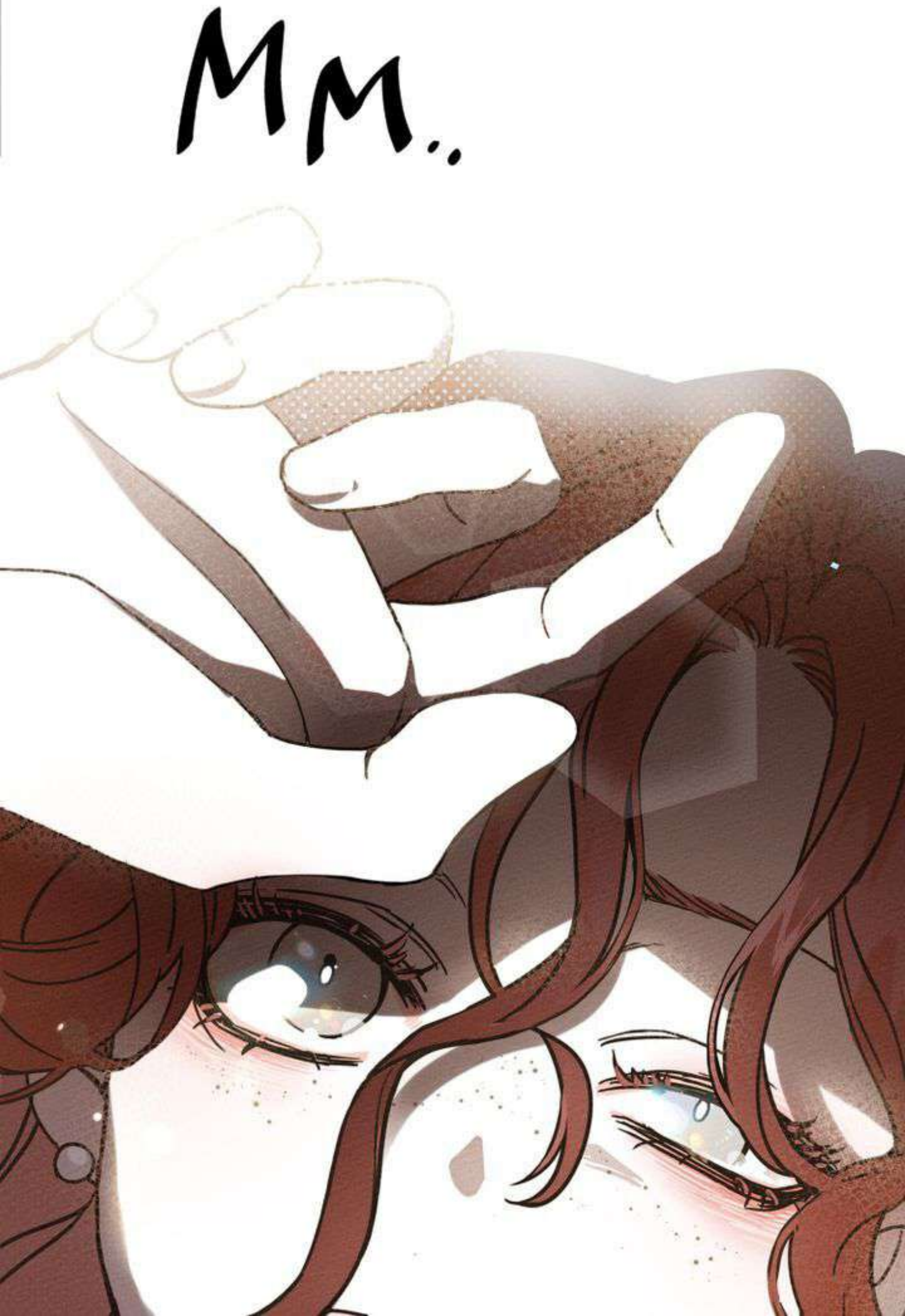

PEC

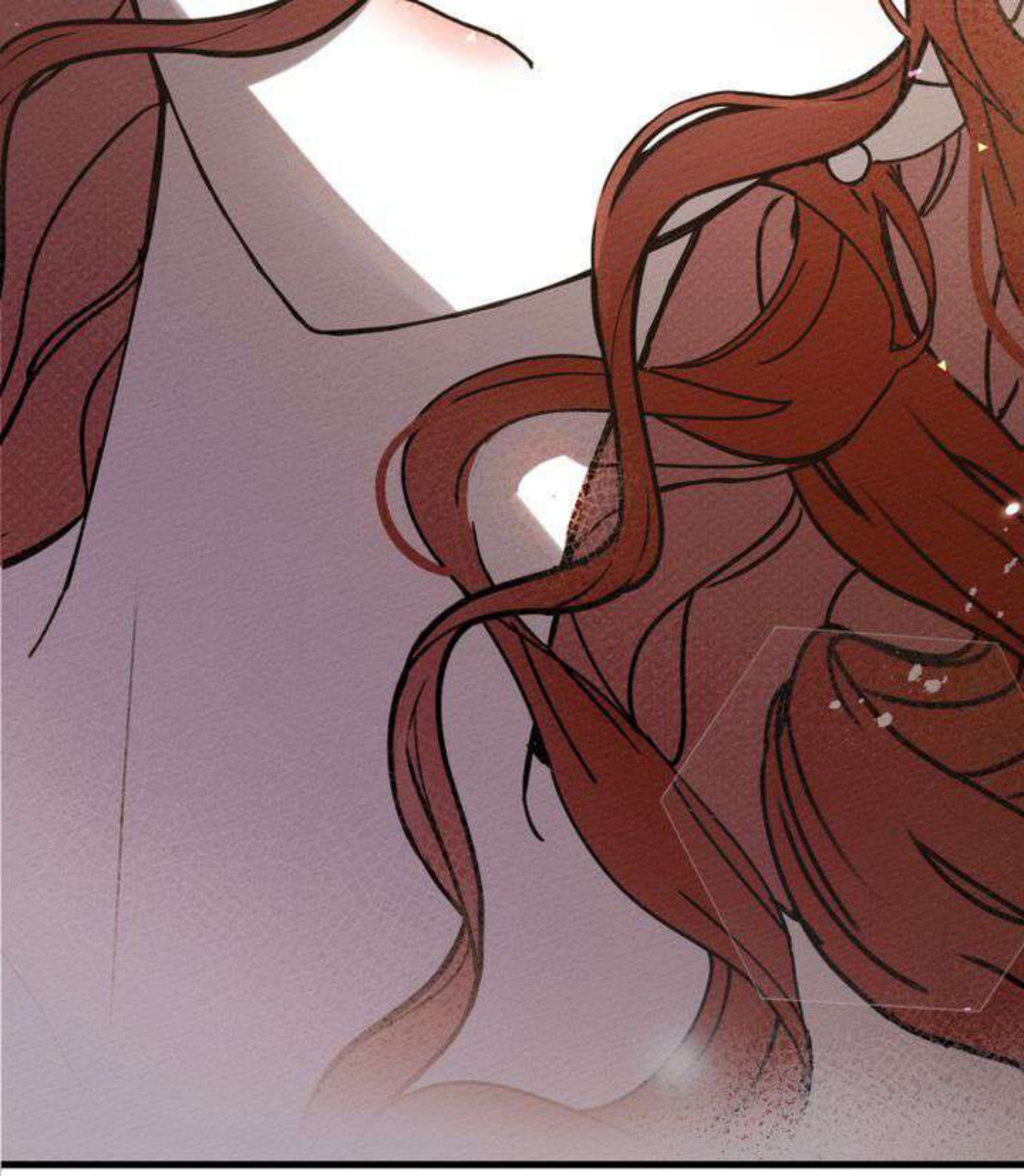

BECAUSE I WON'T BE ABLE TO STOP EITHER.
PL
OP

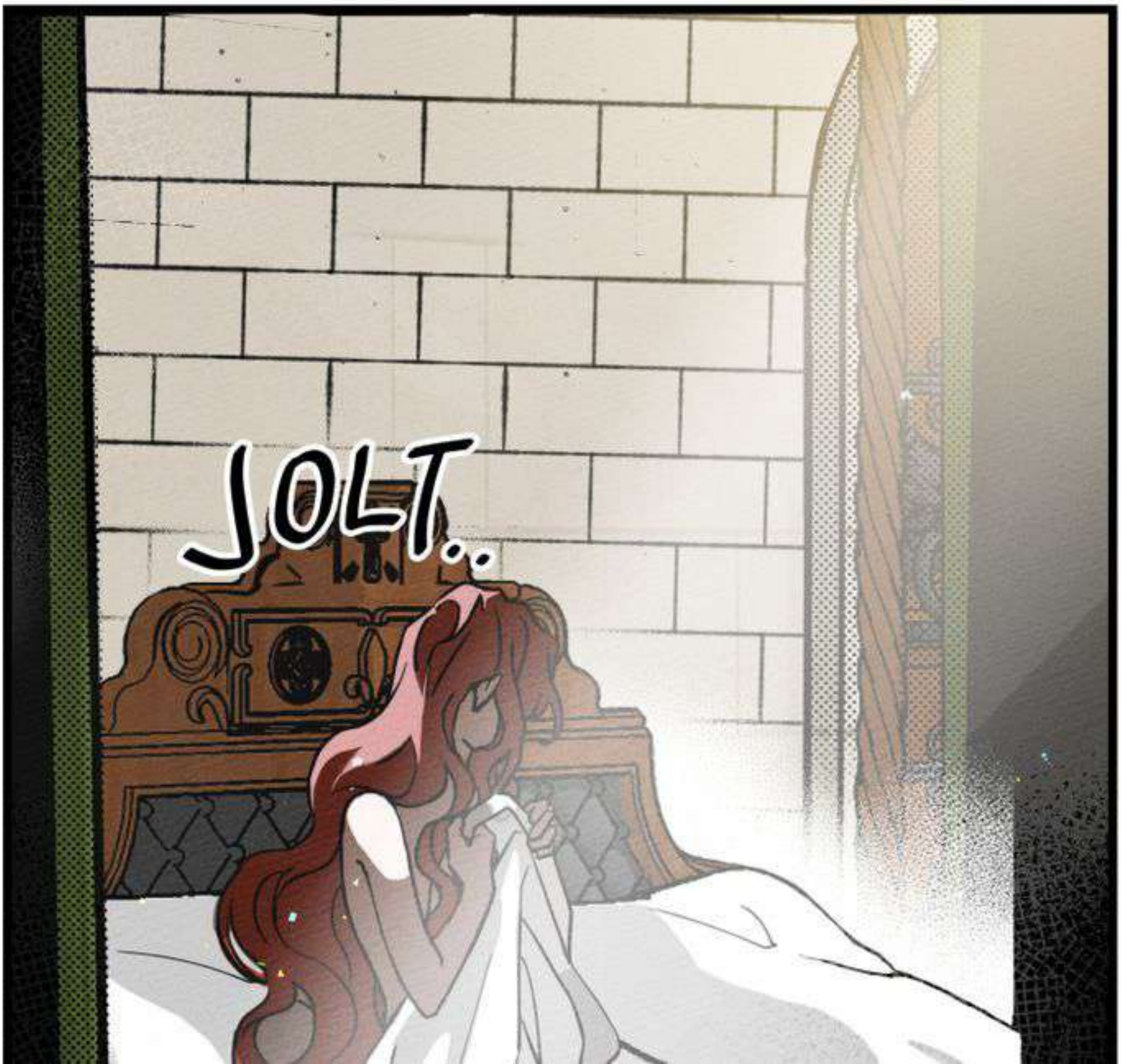


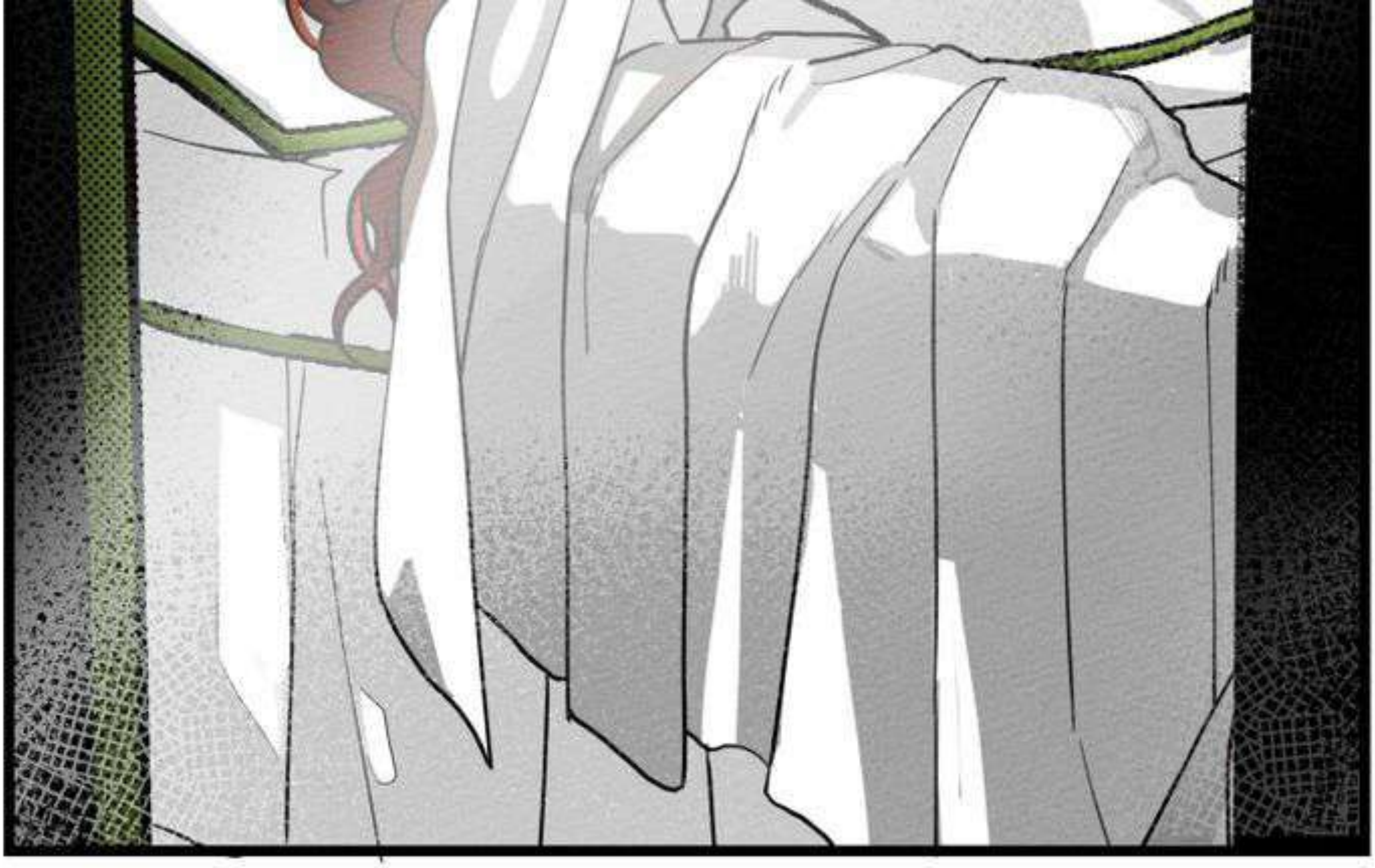
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO DO THIS!

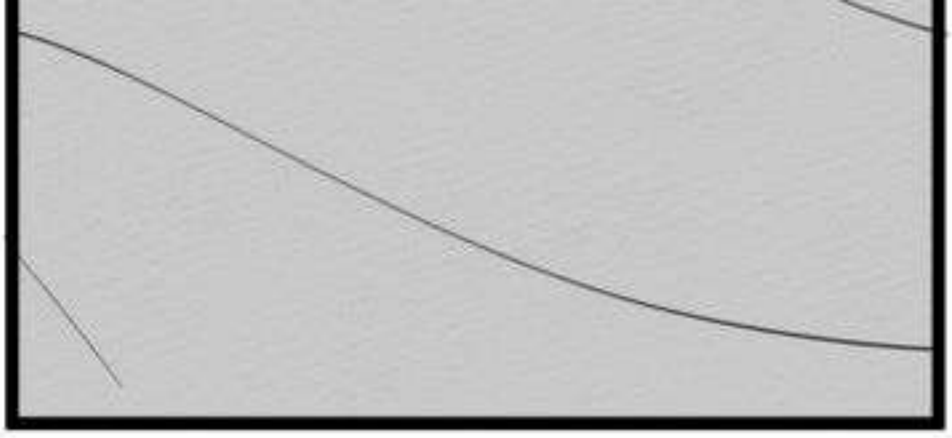



MM..



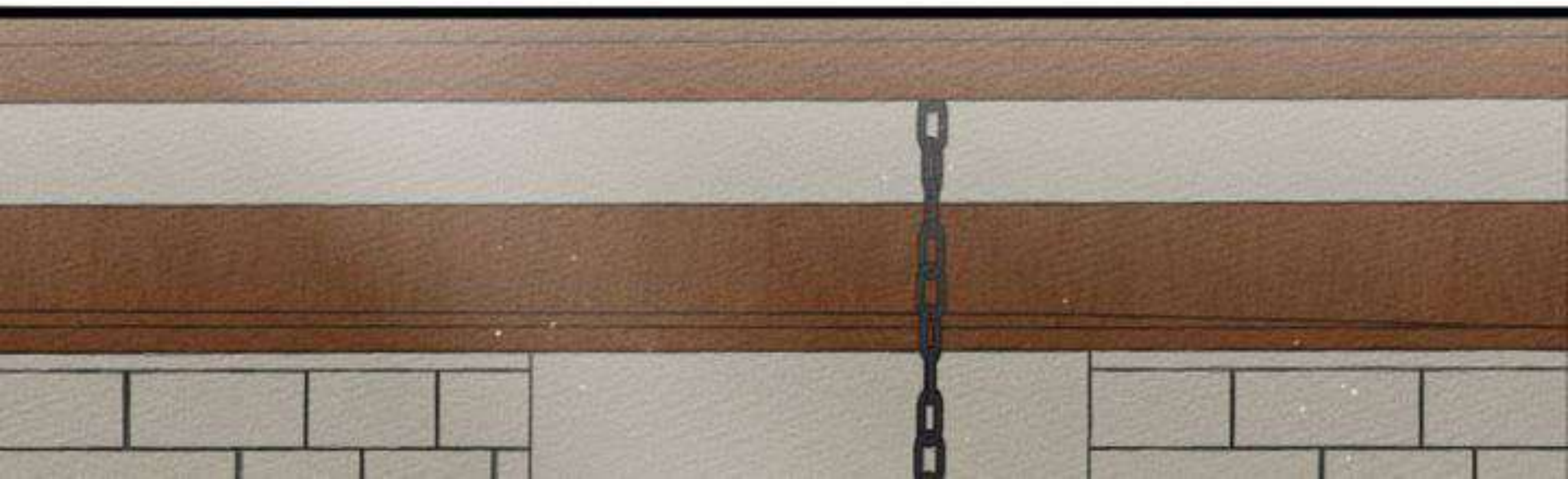

JOLT..

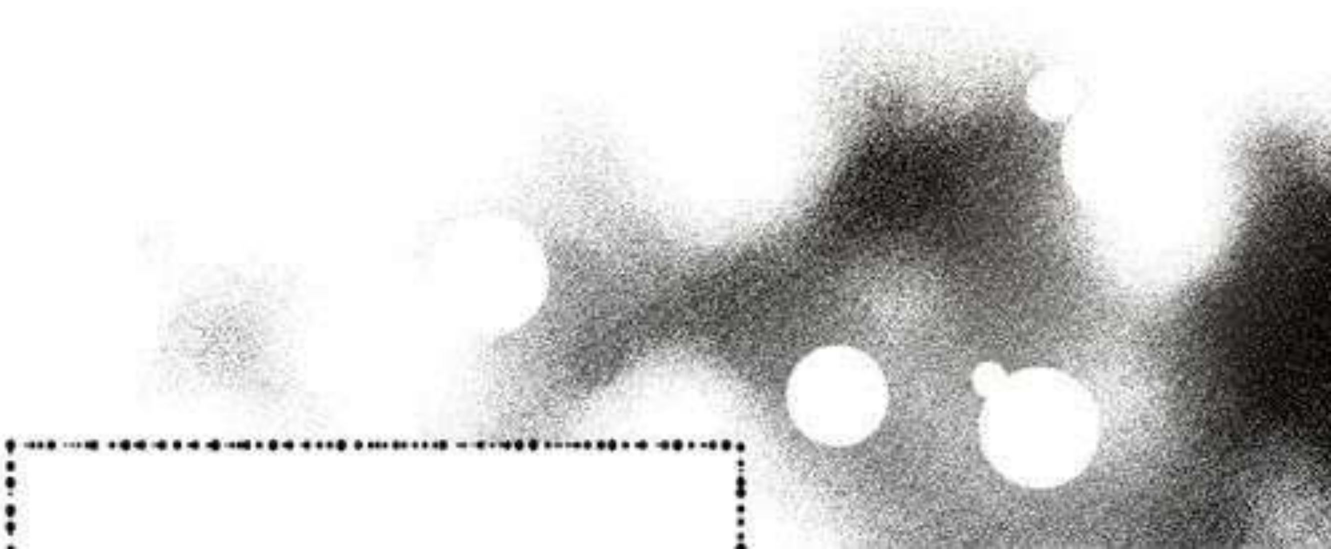




BY THE TIME
I OPENED MY EYES,

RIFTAN HAD ALREADY LEFT
TO JOIN THE DRAGON CAMPAIGN.

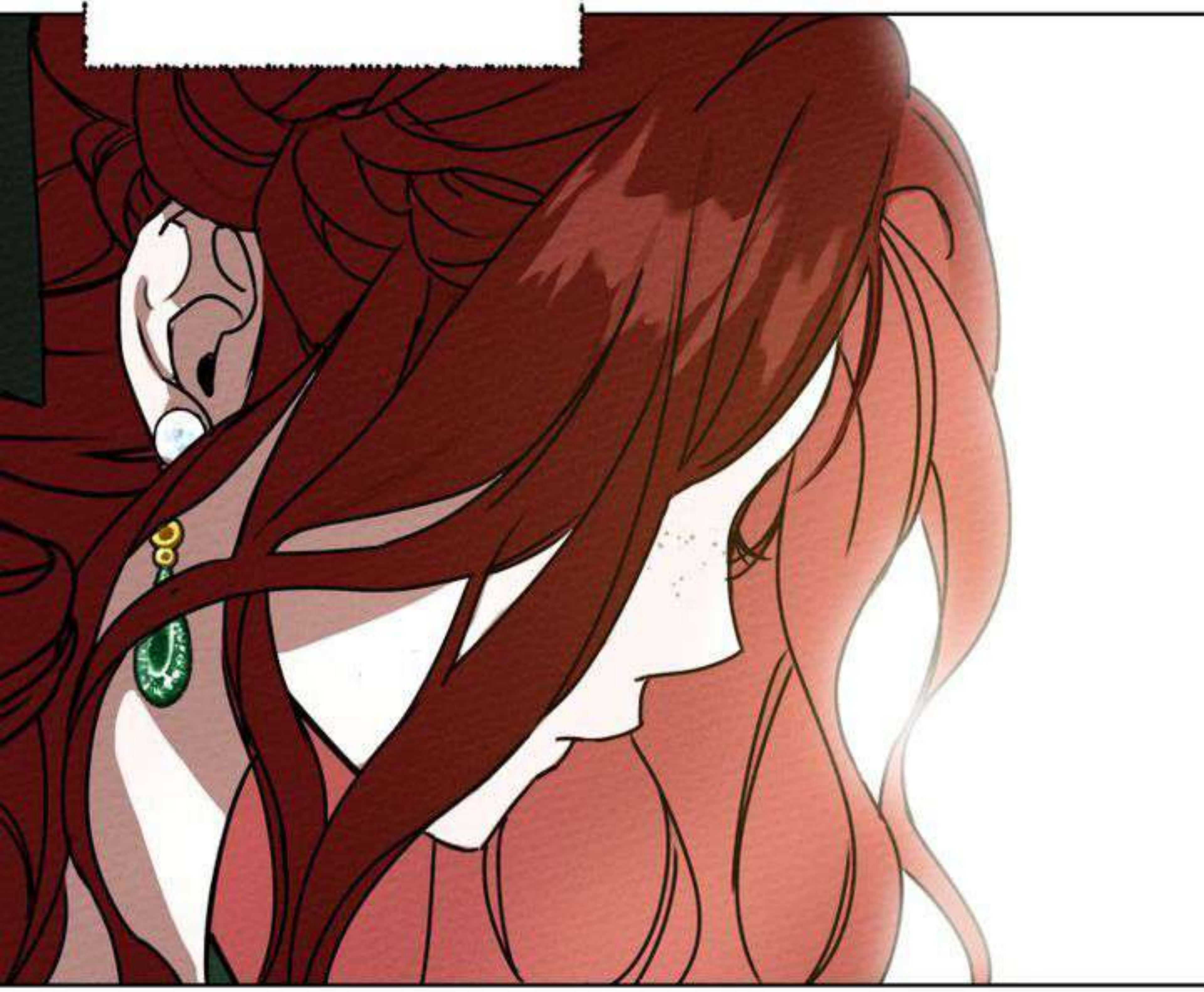


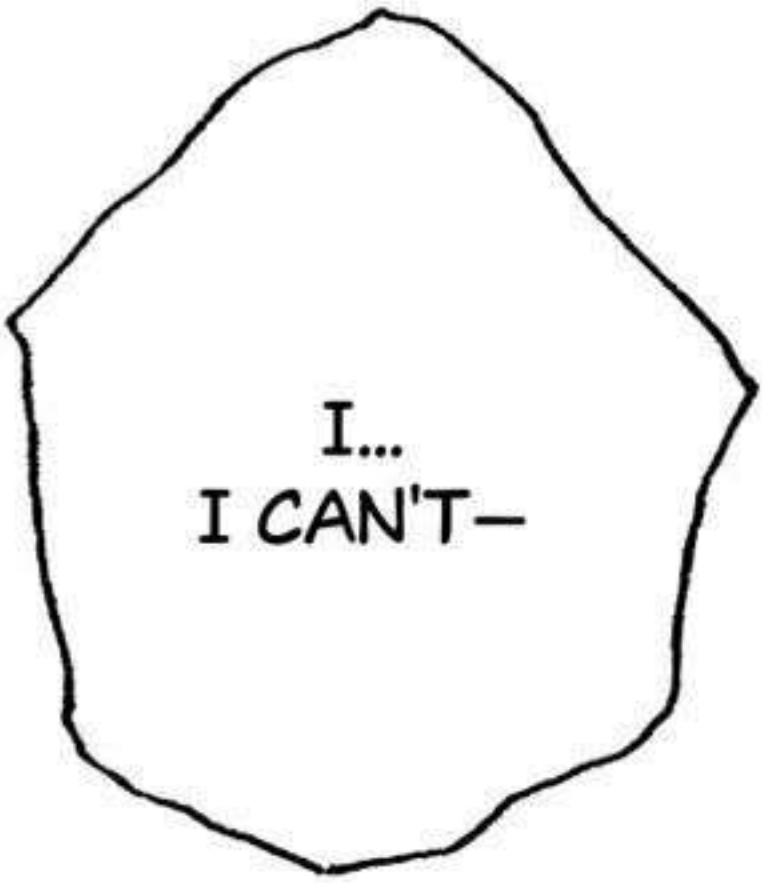


HE LEFT SO
ABRUPTLY
THAT DAY.
WILL MY PLEA
BE ENOUGH
TO MOVE HIM?

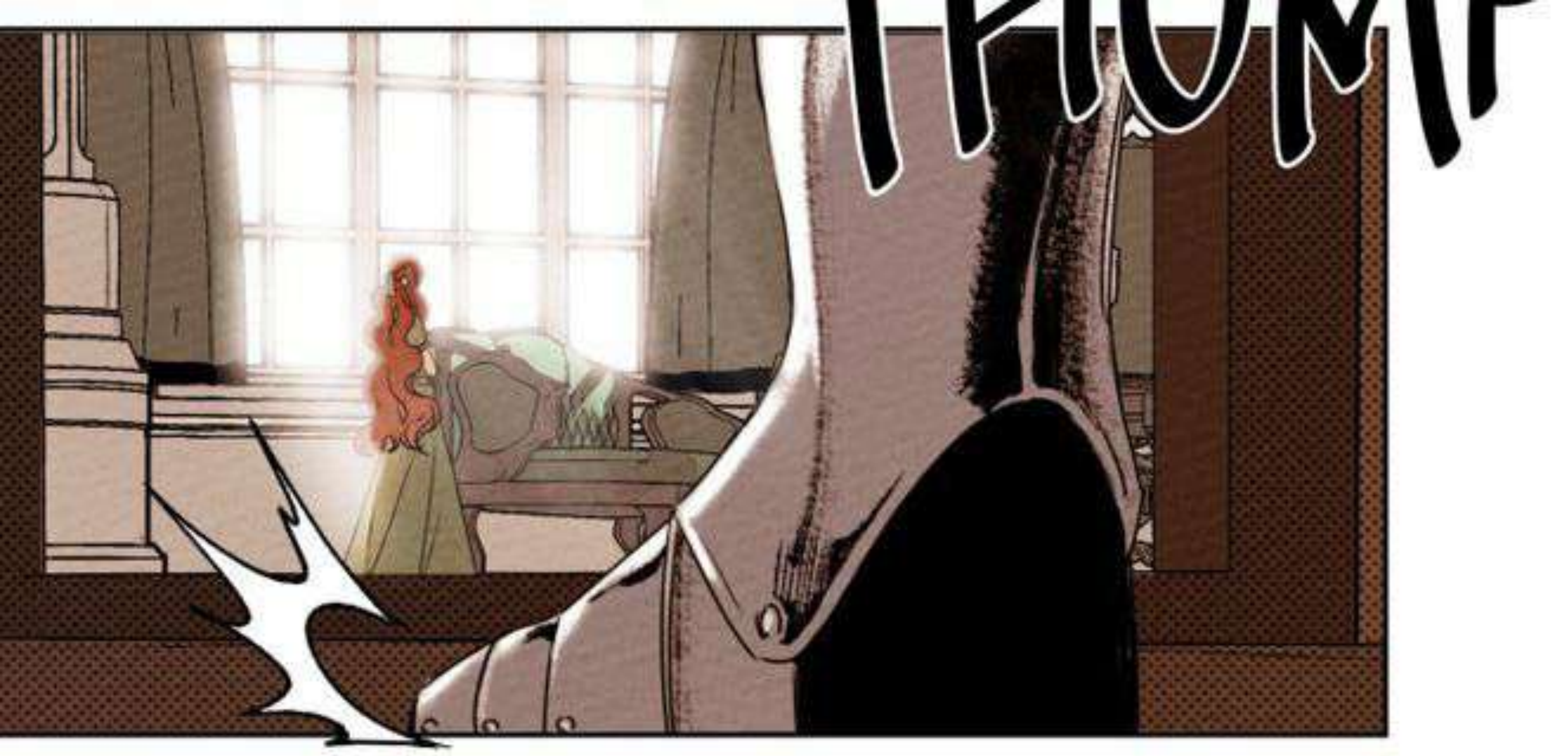
NO.
NO ONE WOULD
EVER WANT
A DREARY WOMAN
LIKE ME...

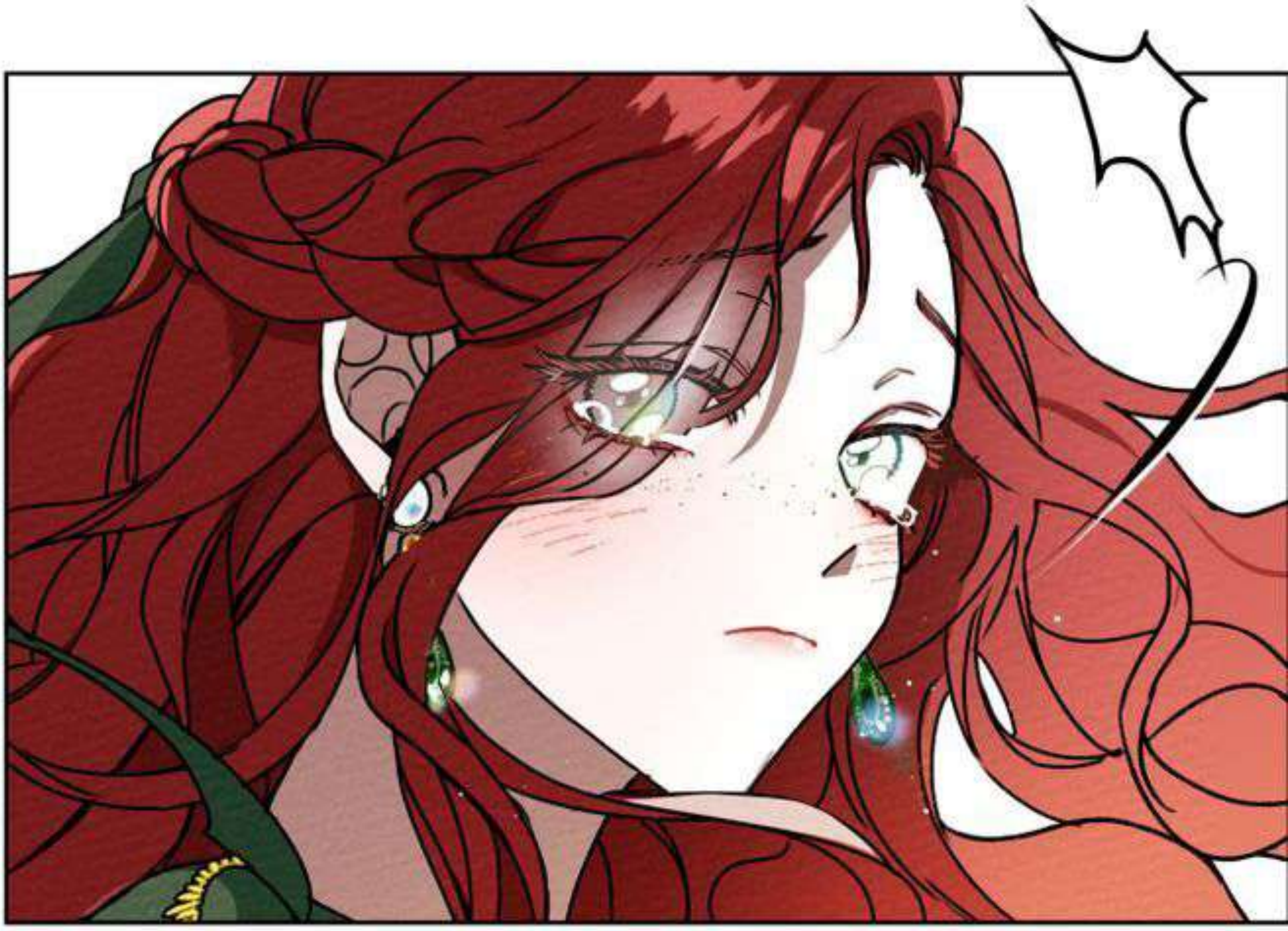
AND AFTER ALL, WE ONLY SPENT ONE NIGHT TOGETHER...



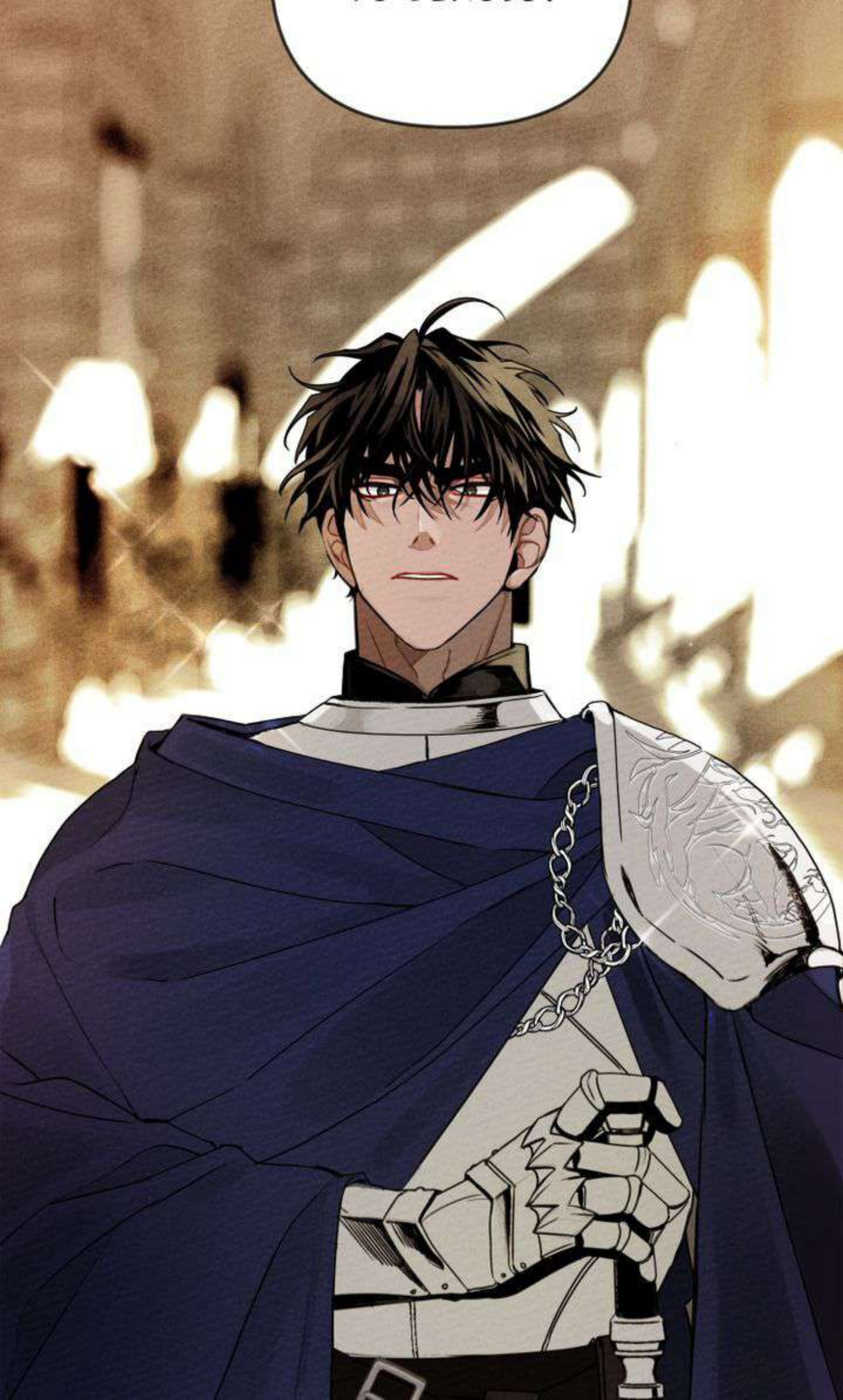

I...
I CAN'T—

THUMP


THUMP

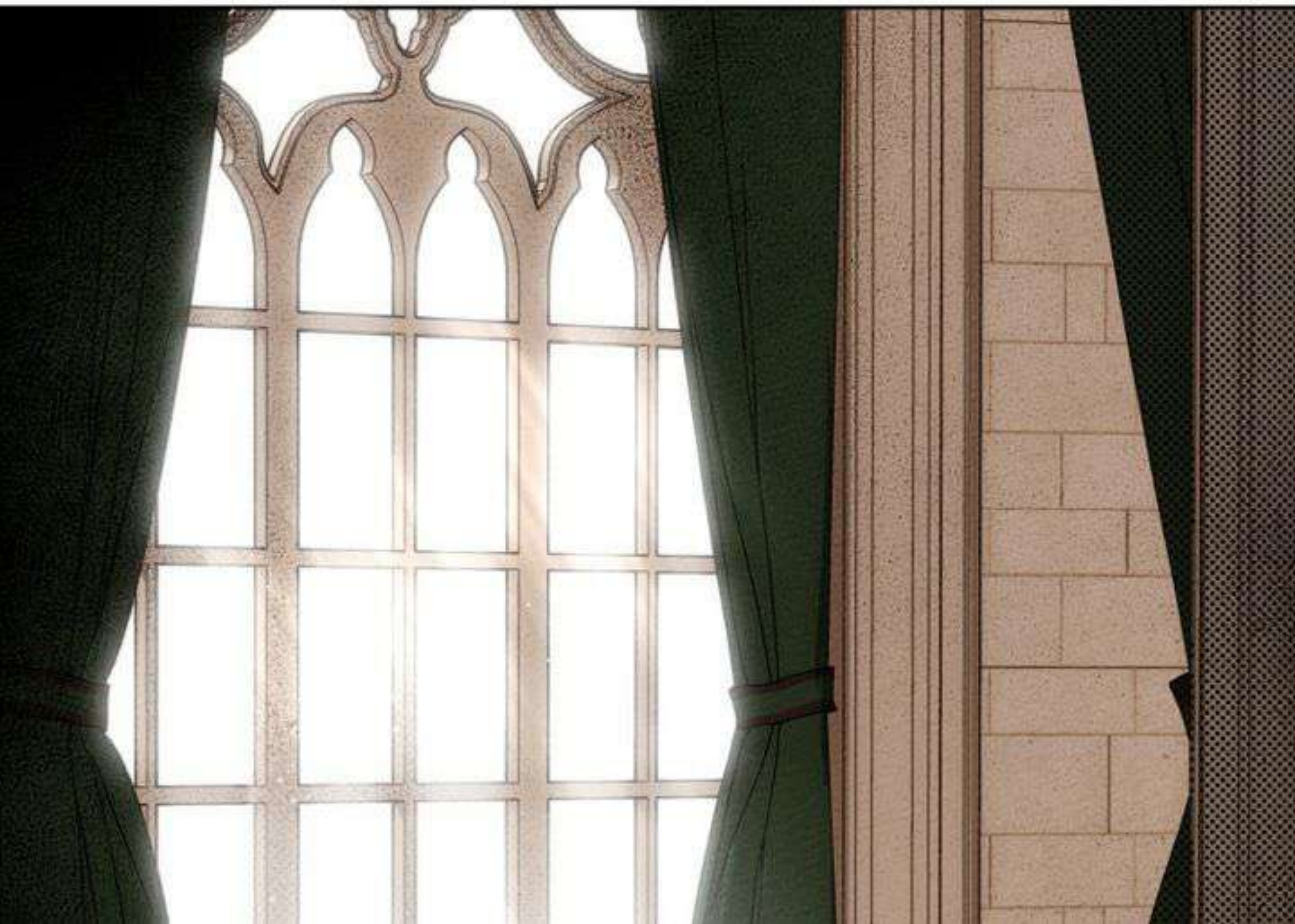


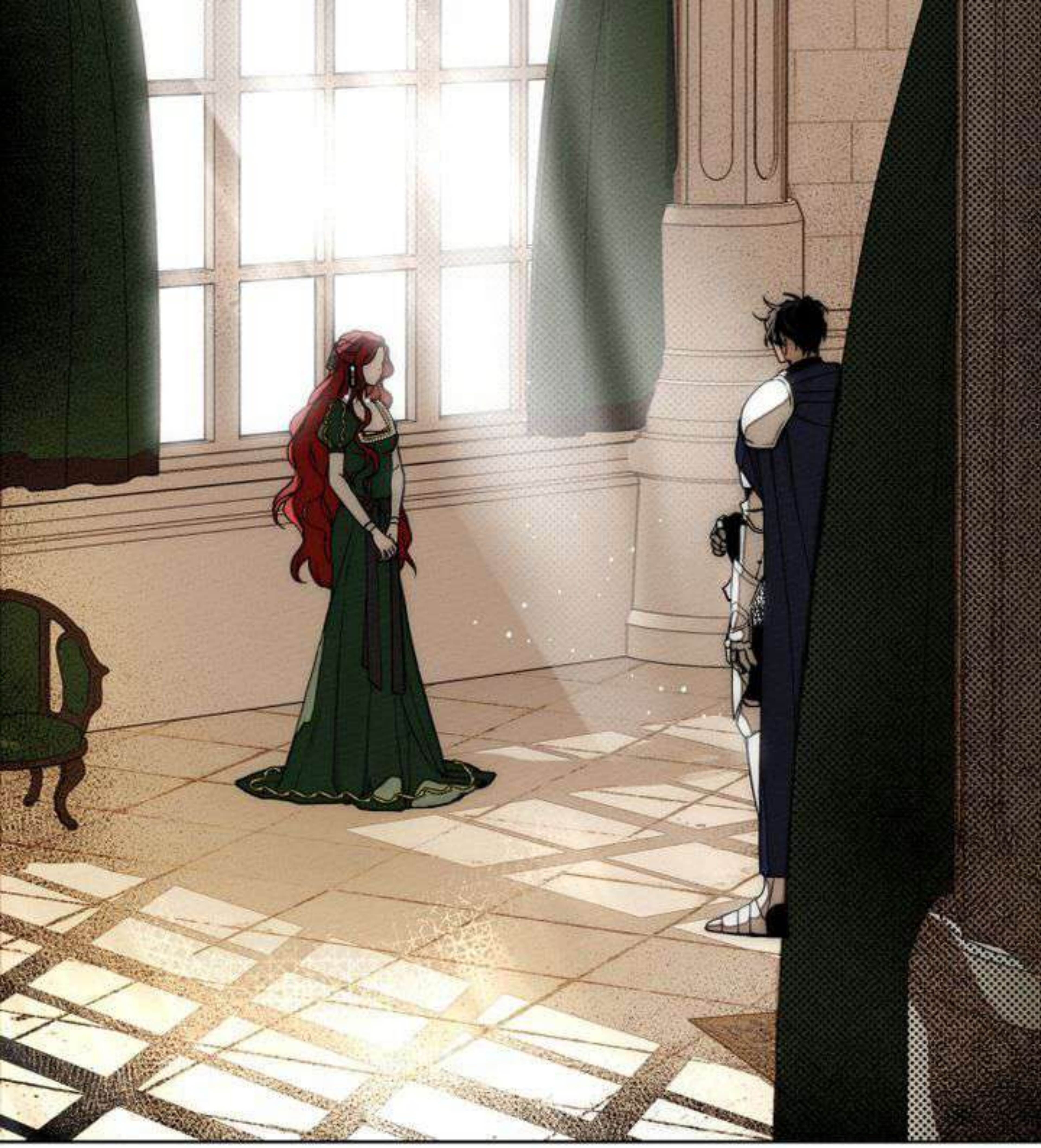
THIS IS A SIGHT TO BEHOLD.

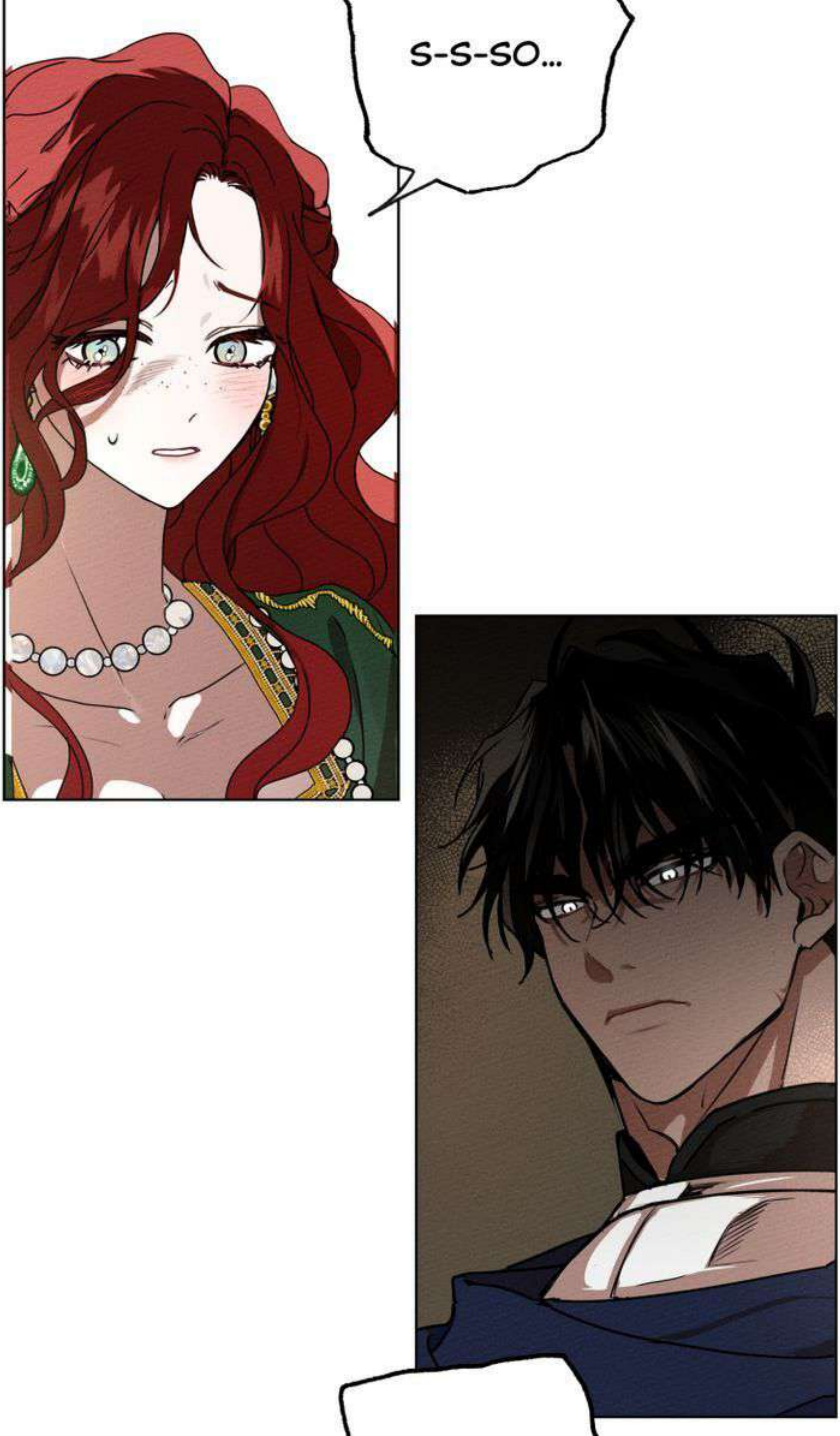


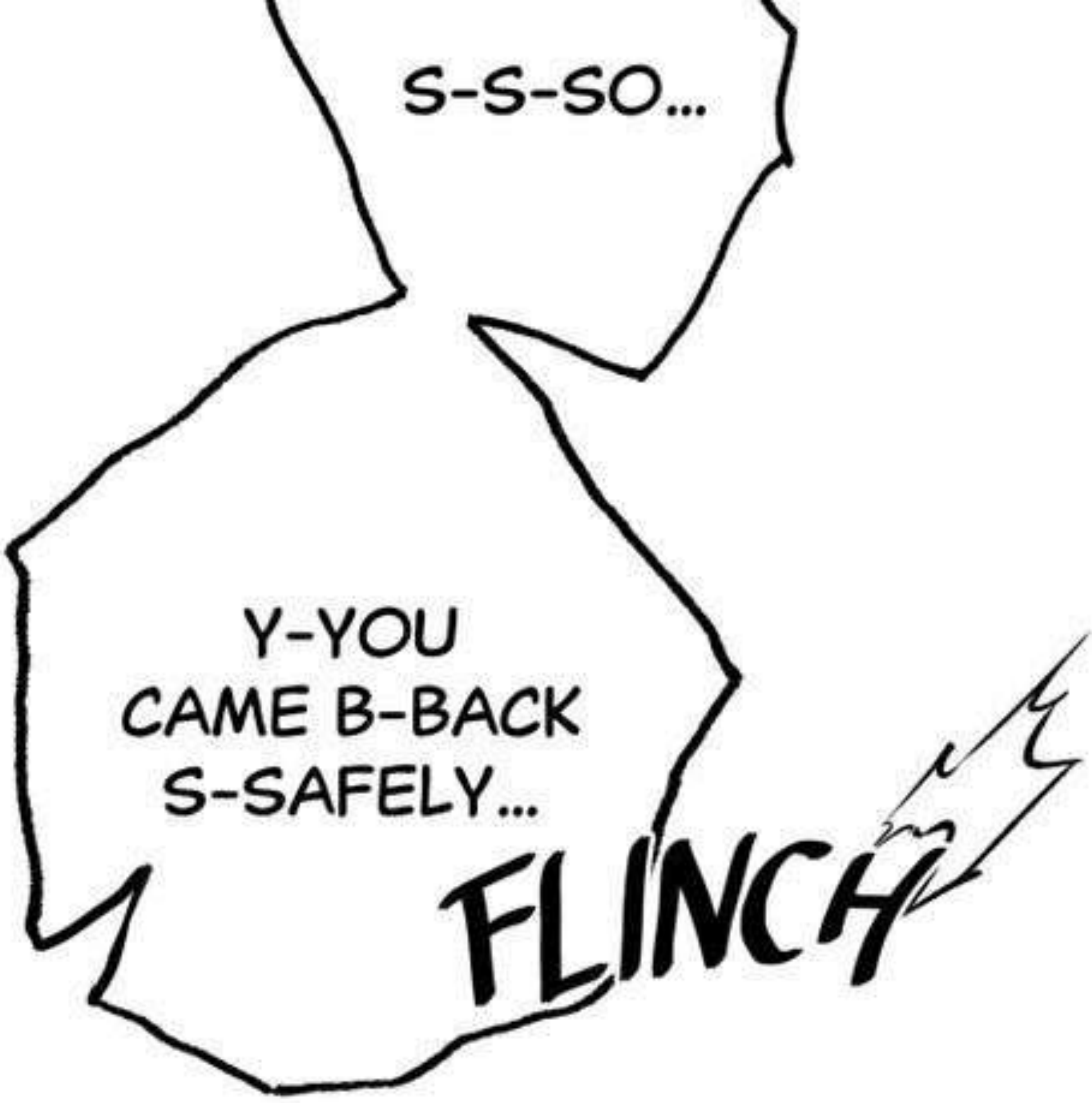
THE TREMBLING WIFE

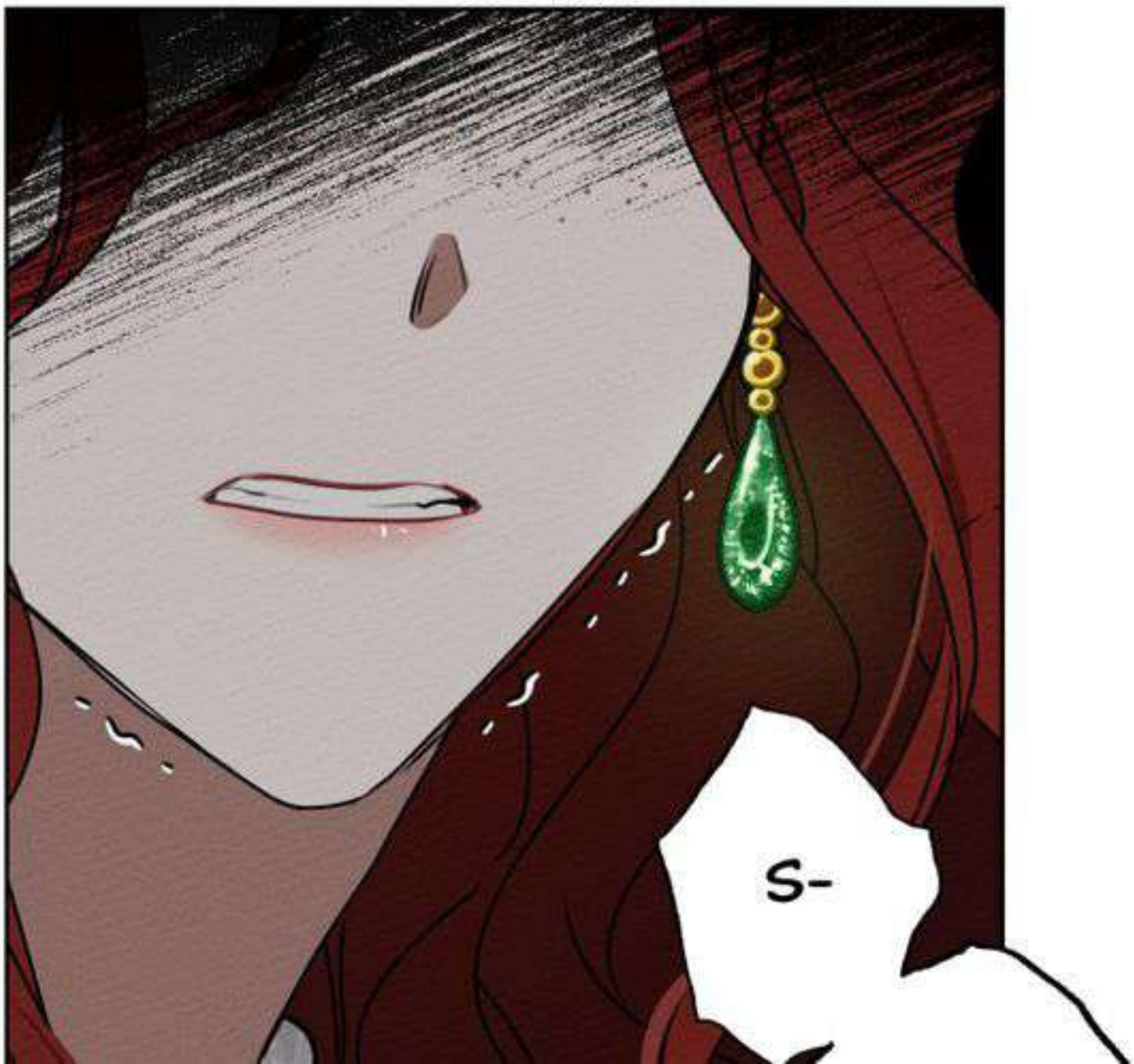
AWAITING HER HUSBAND'S RETURN FROM THE TRENCHES.



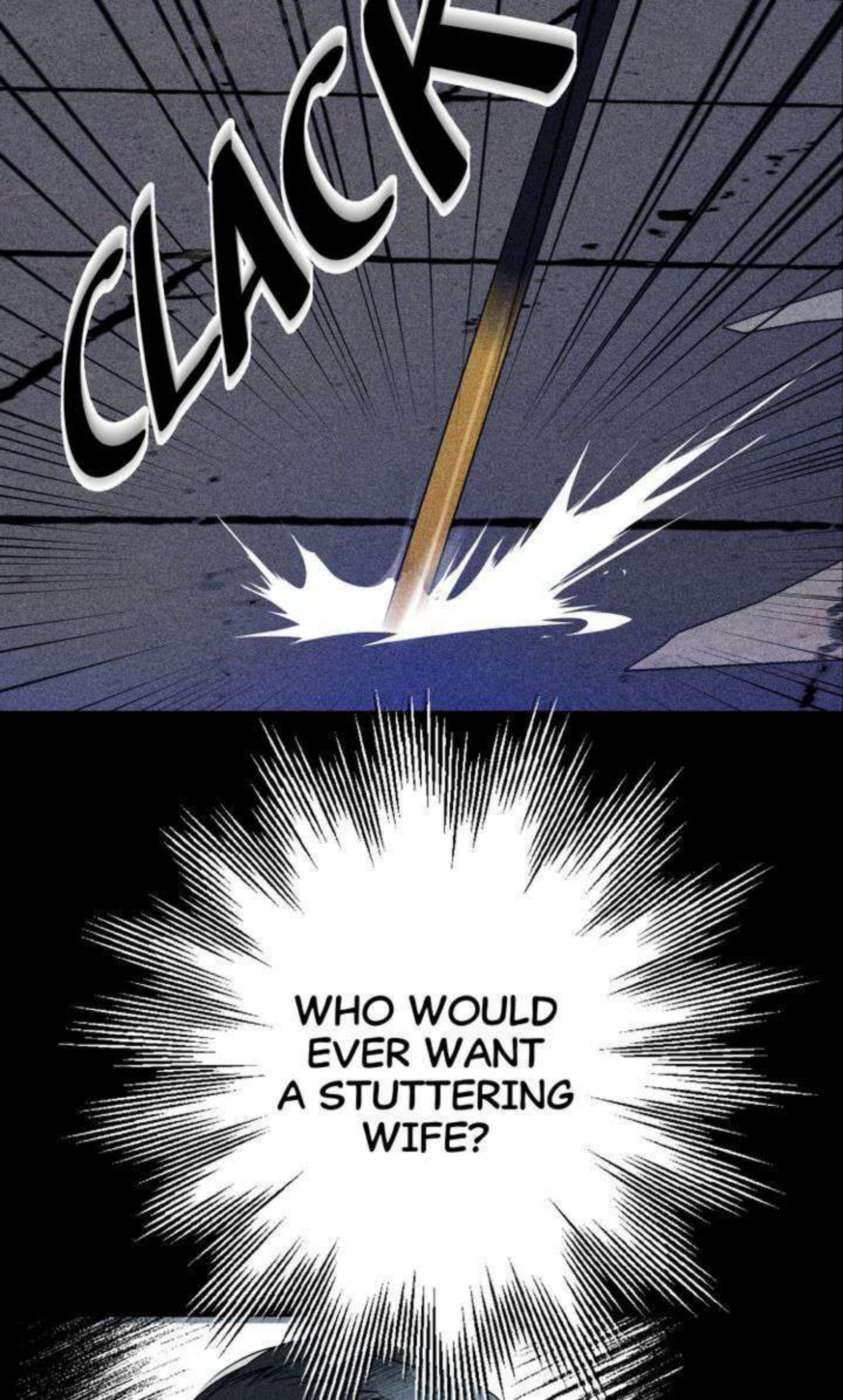


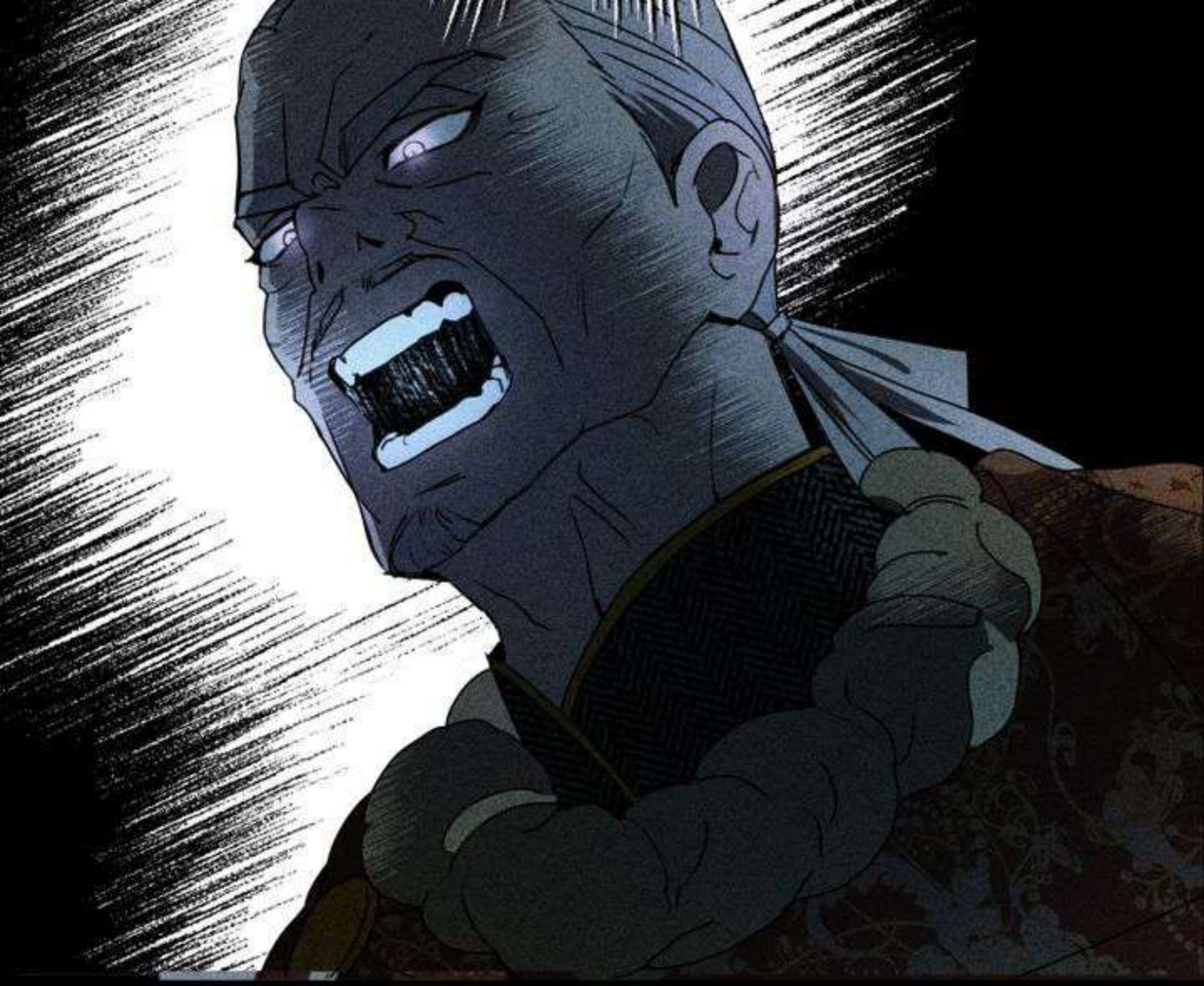

S-S-SO...


S-S-SO...
Y-YOU CAME B-BACK S-SAFELY...
FLINCH

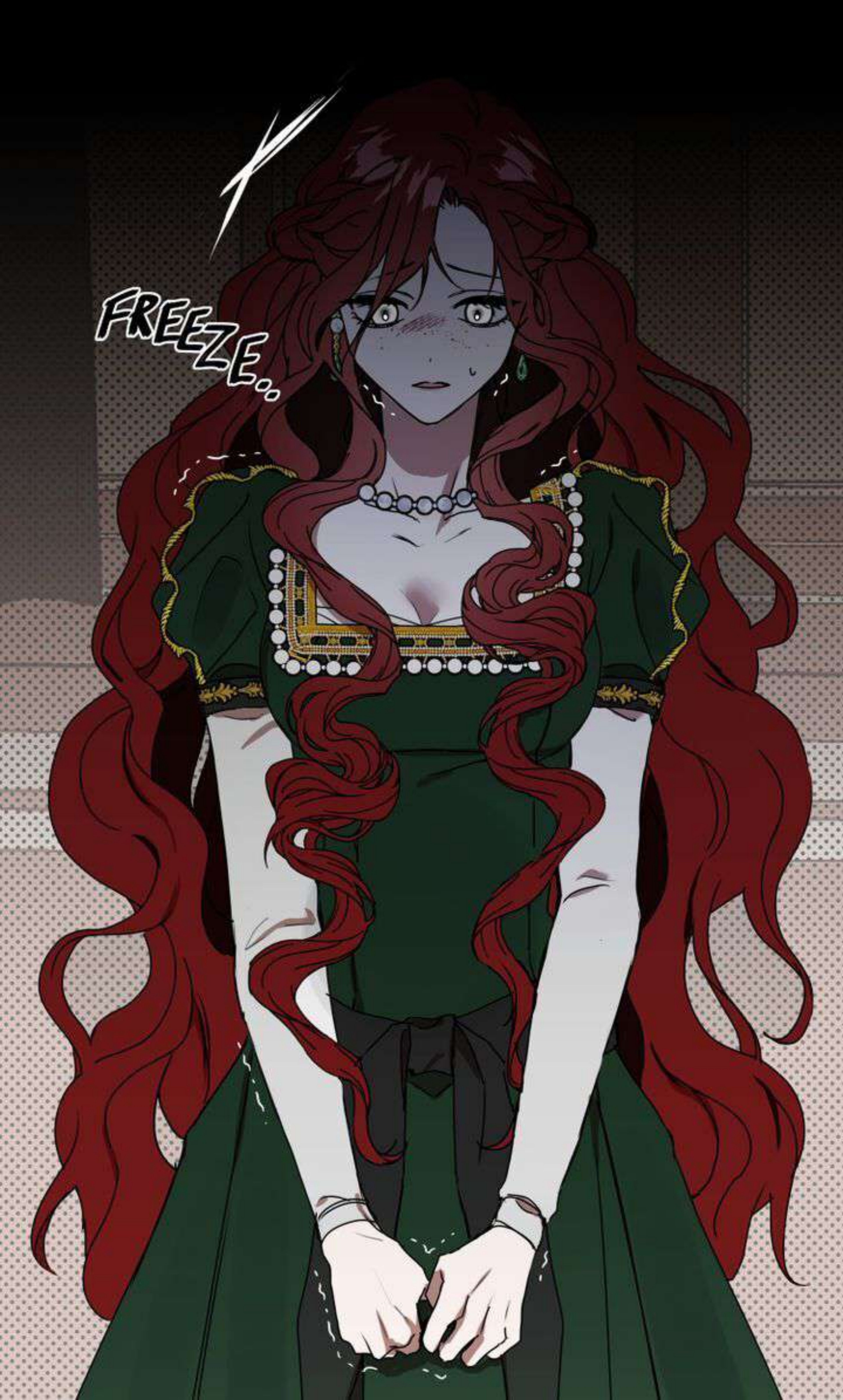

S-

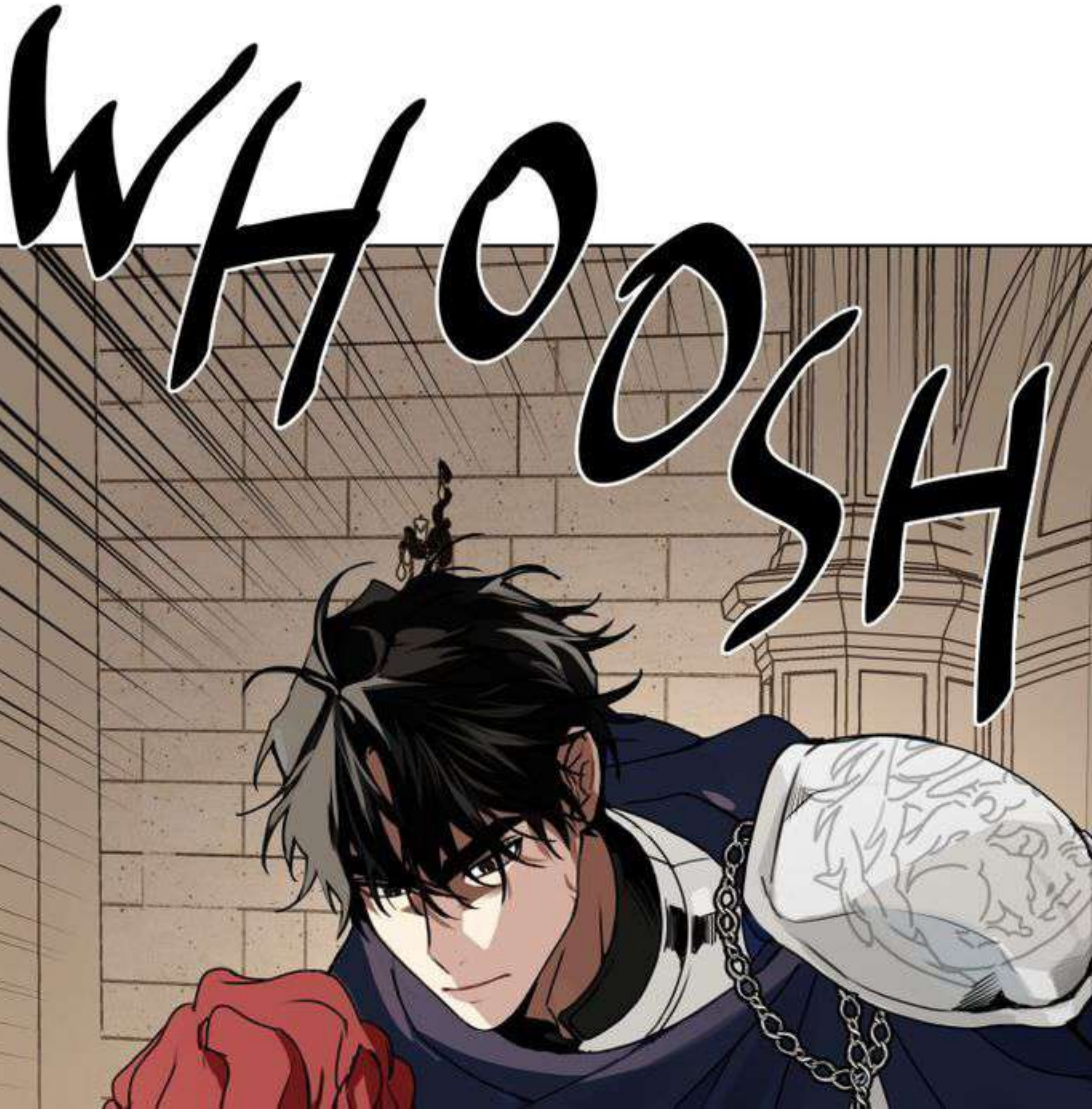
S-SO...

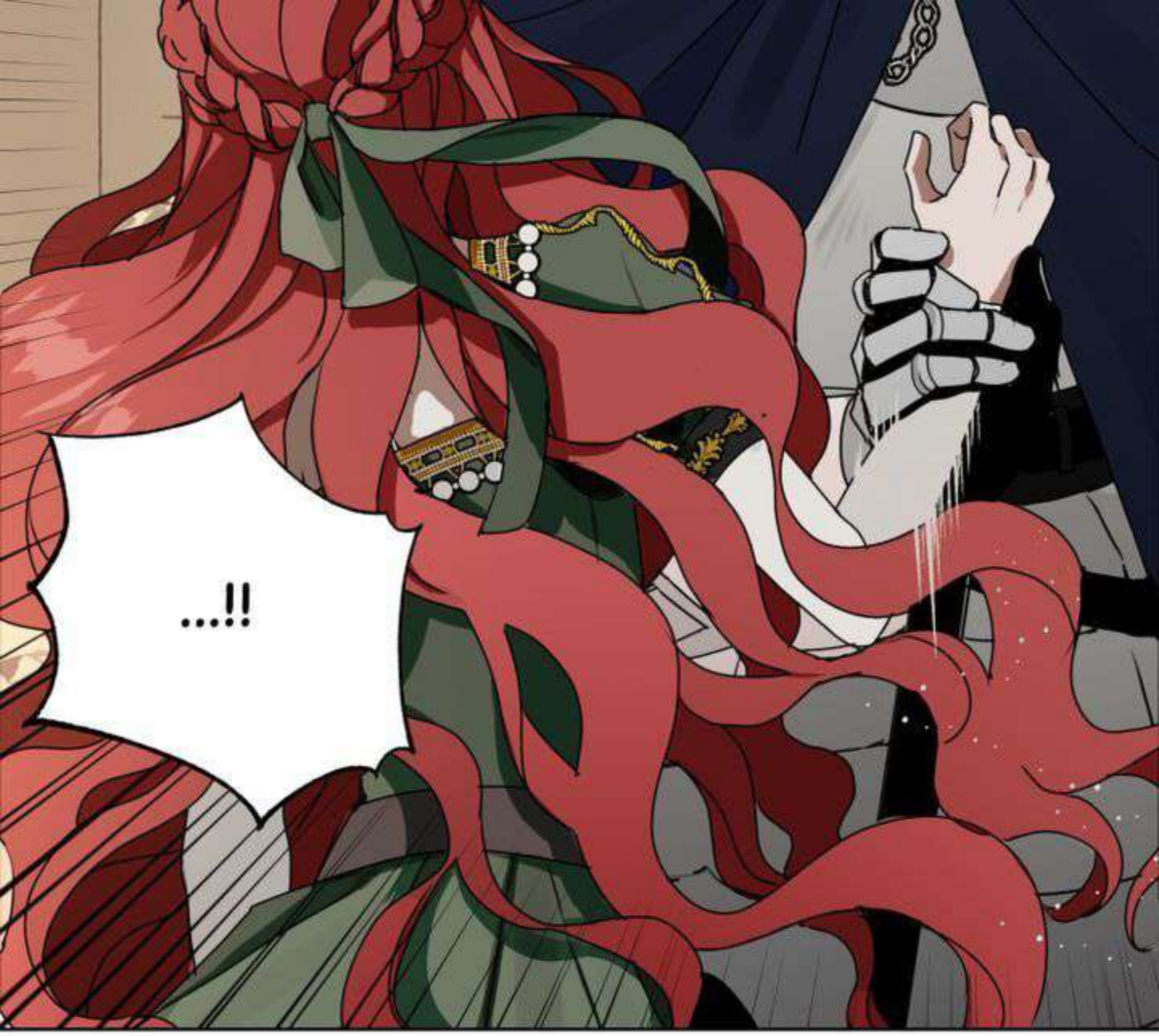

CLACK
WHO WOULD EVER WANT A STUTTERING WIFE?

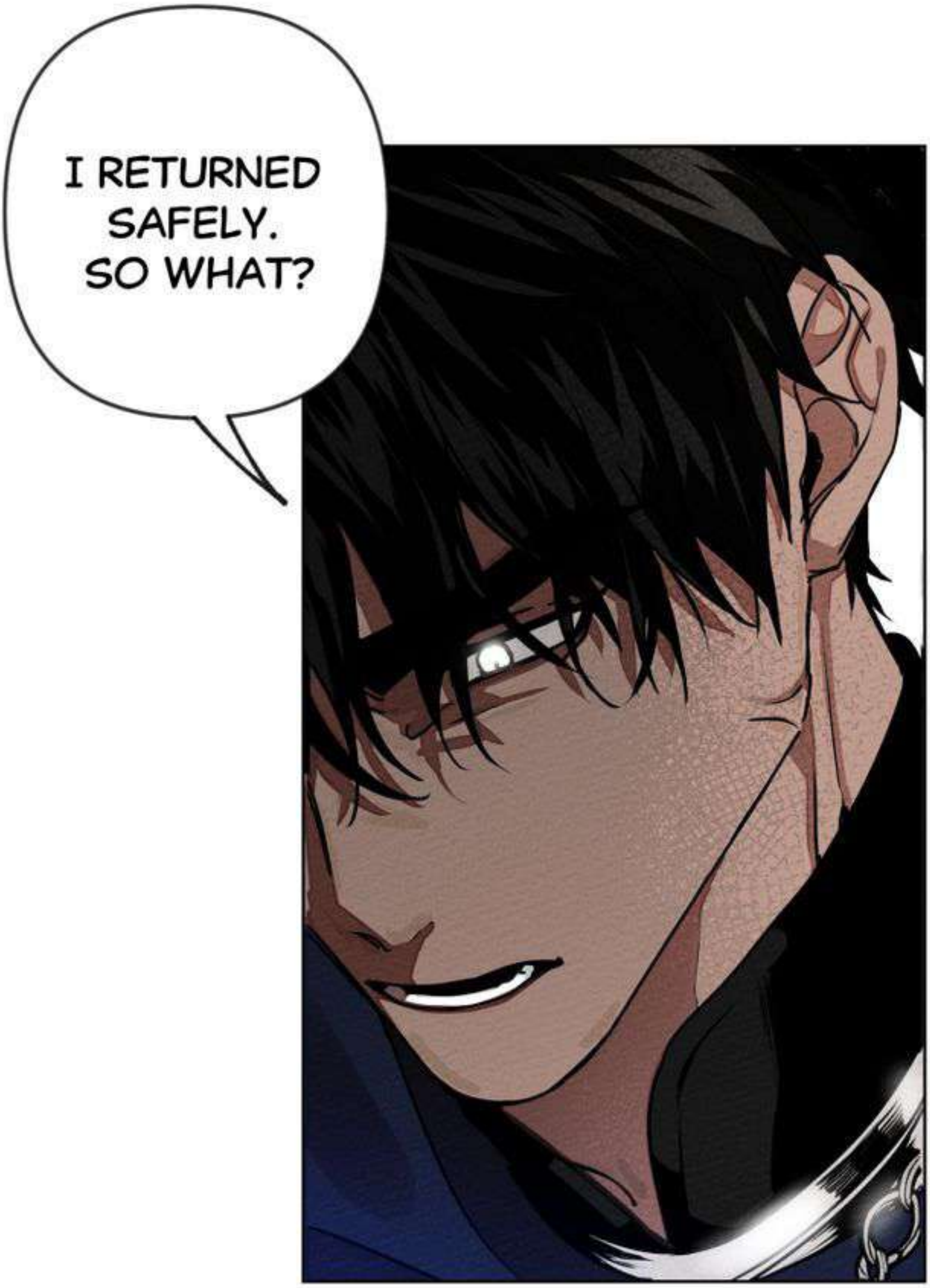


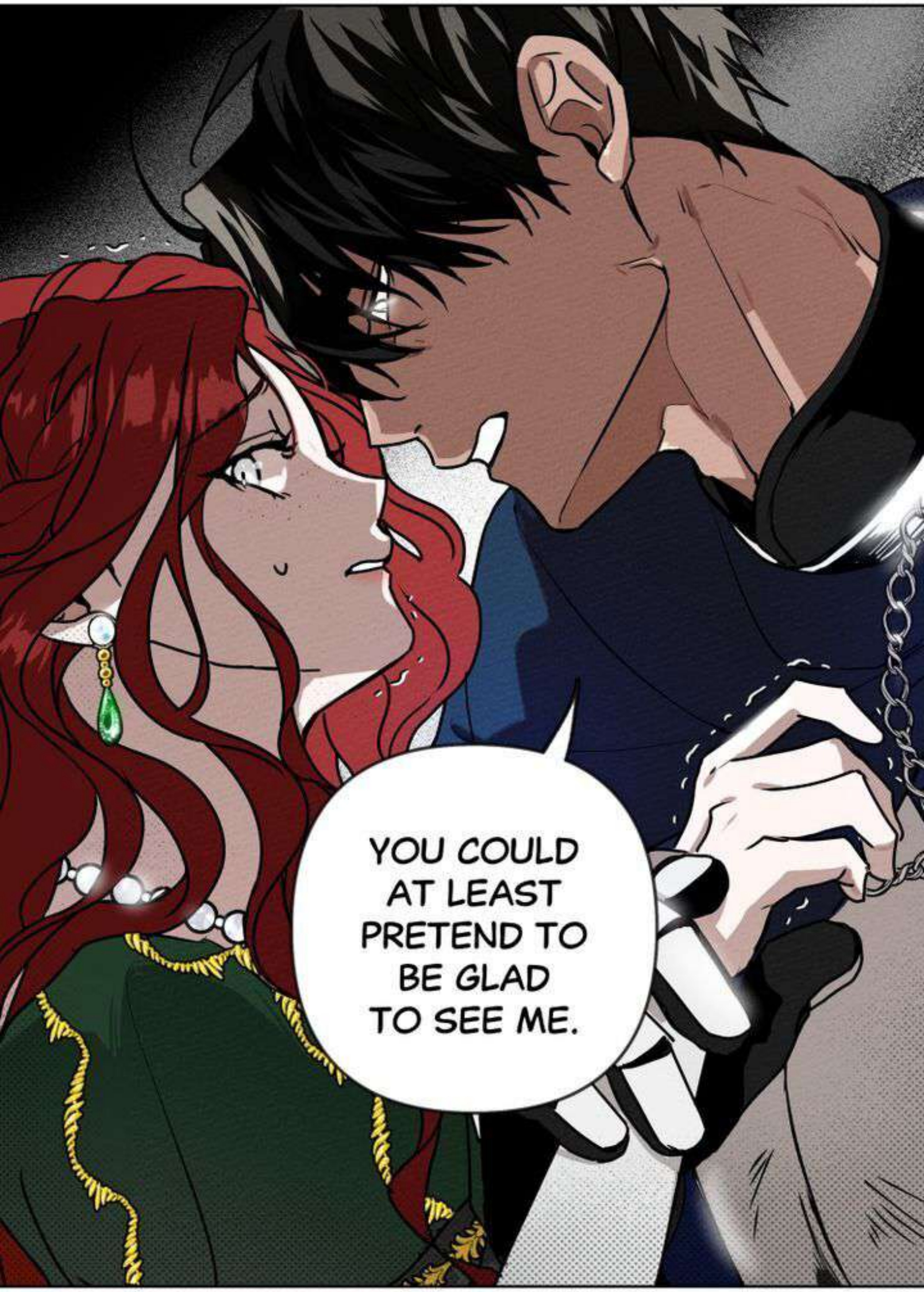
I CAN'T...
I...

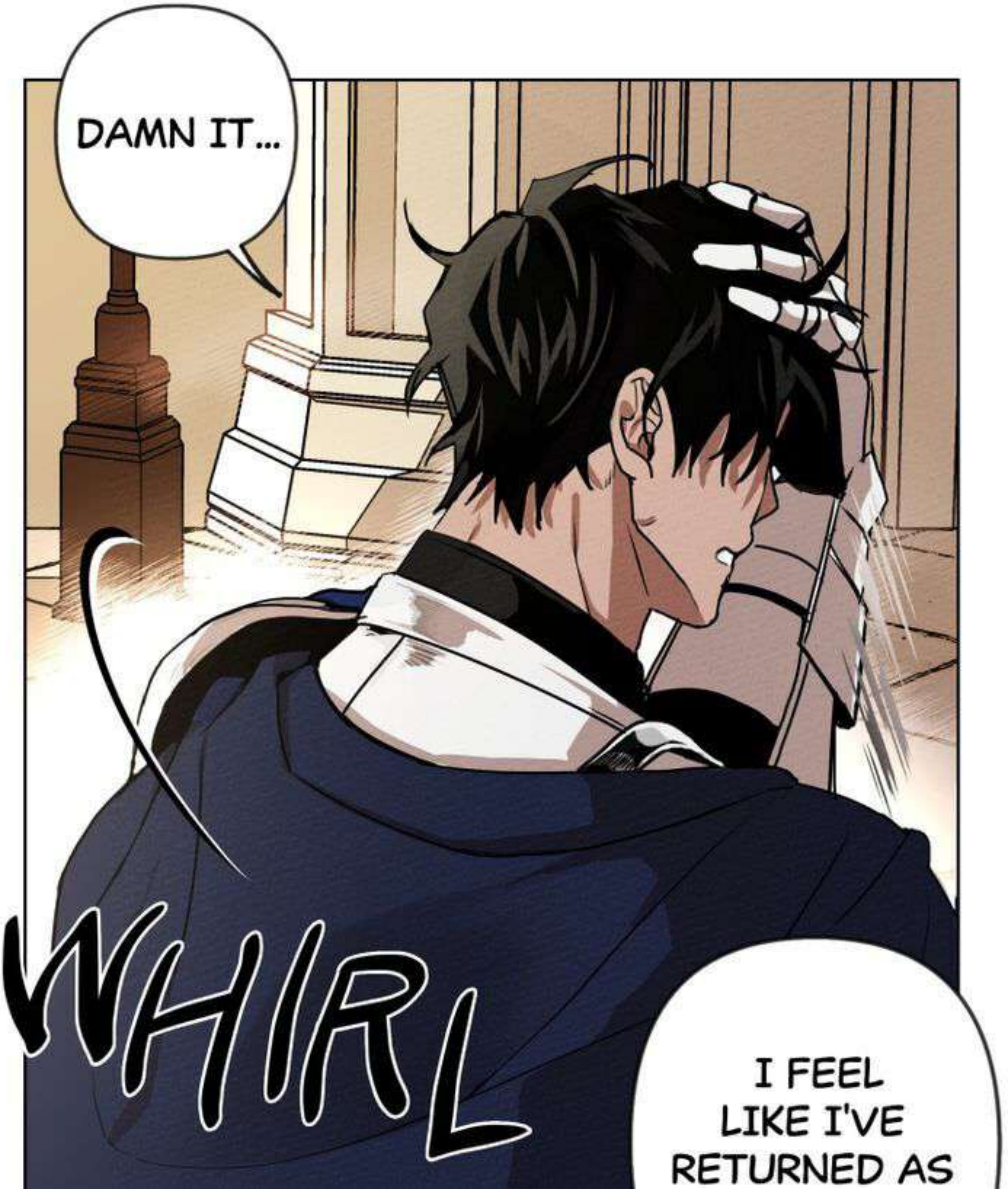

FREEZE..


WHOOSH

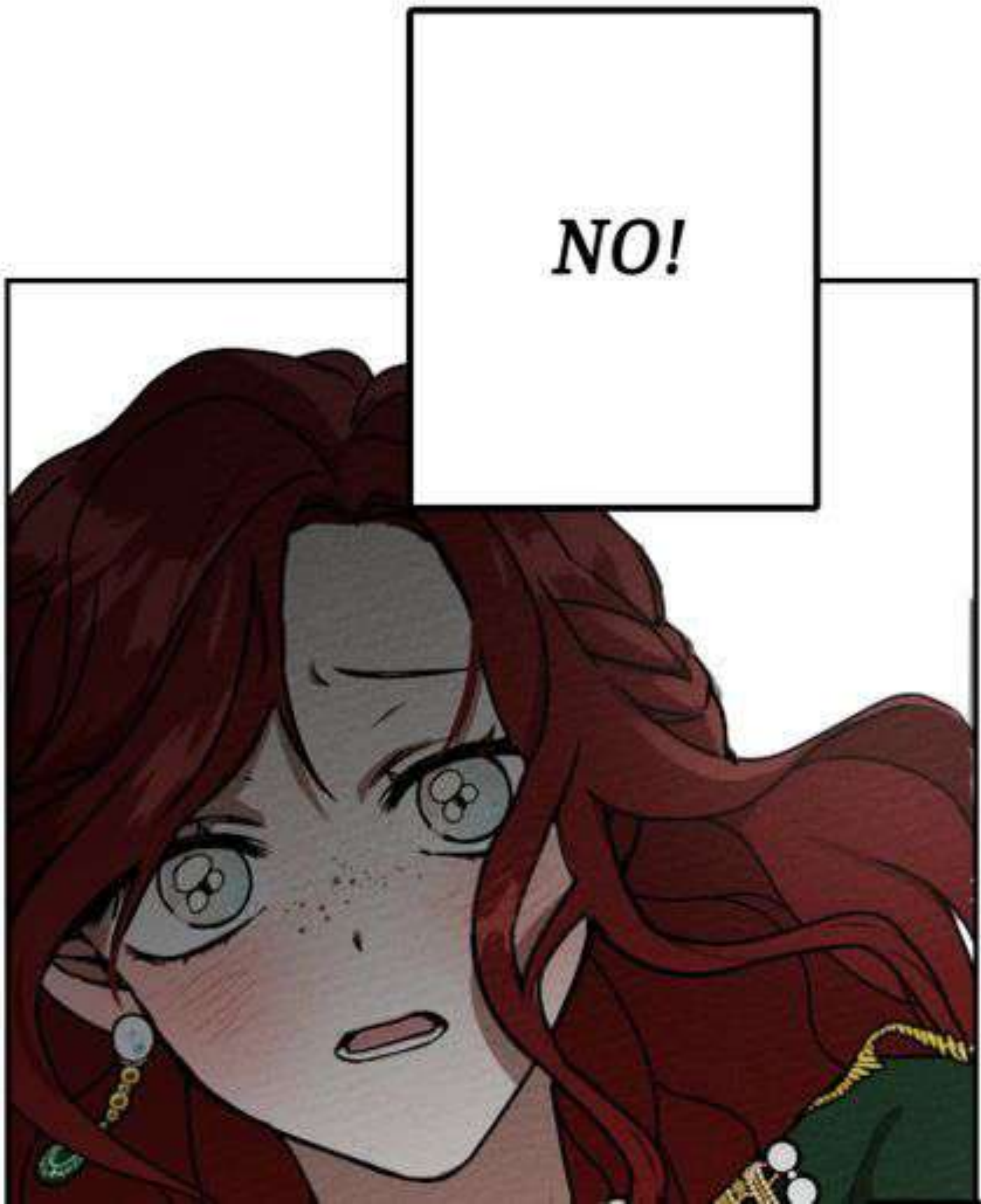


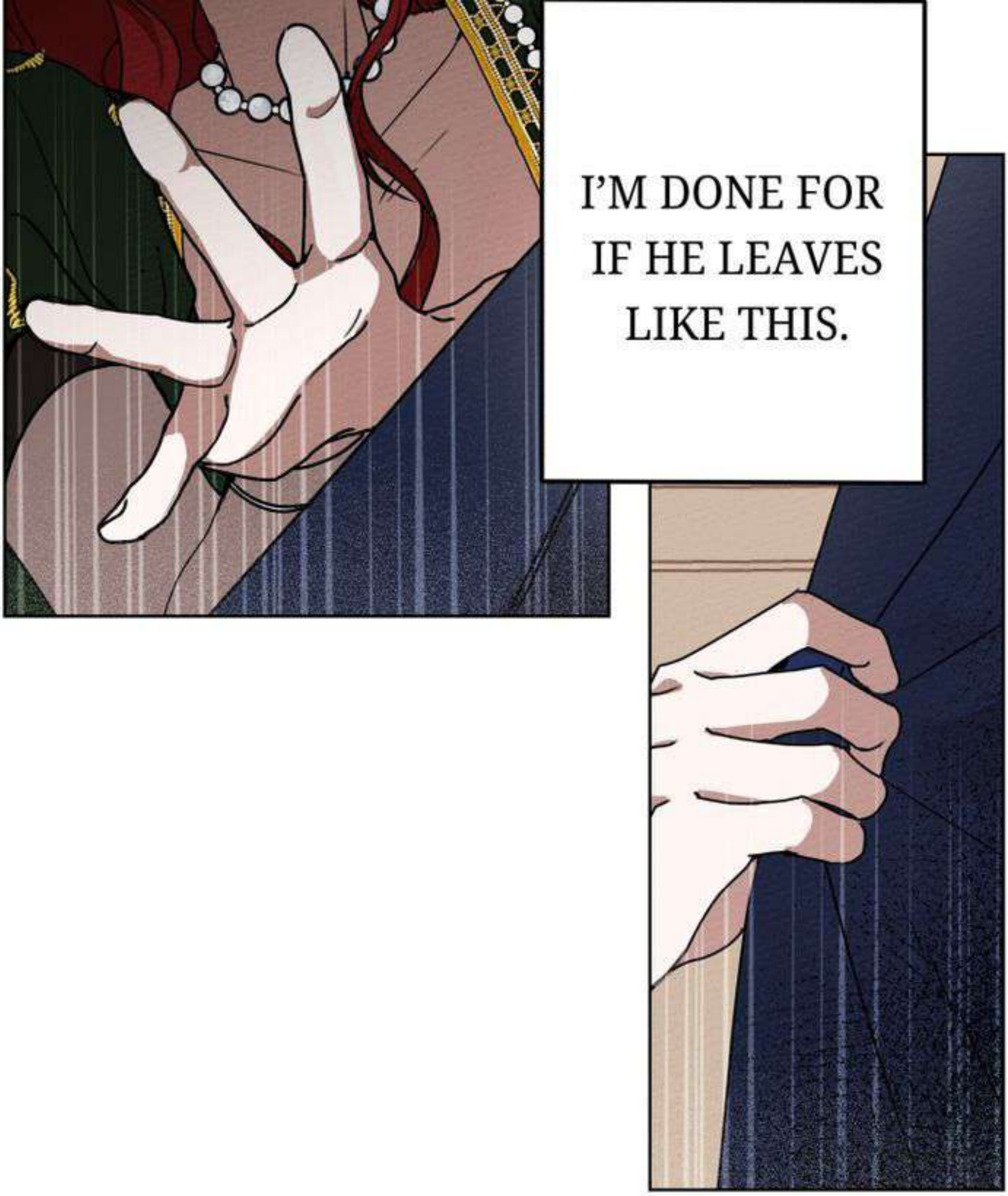

I RETURNED SAFELY. SO WHAT?

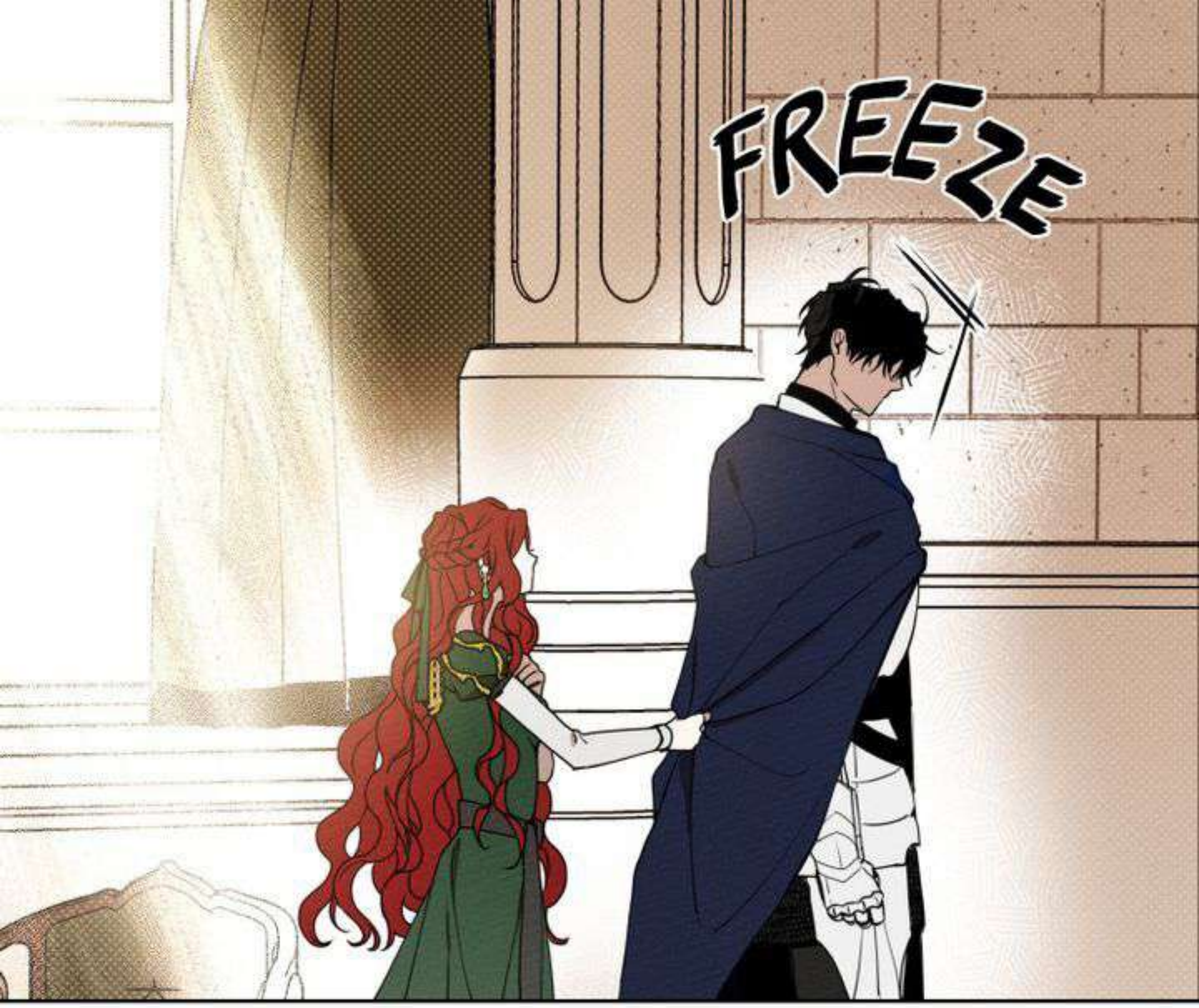

YOU COULD AT LEAST PRETEND TO BE GLAD TO SEE ME.


DAMN IT...
WHIRL
I FEEL LIKE I'VE RETURNED AS

A MONSTER.


NO!

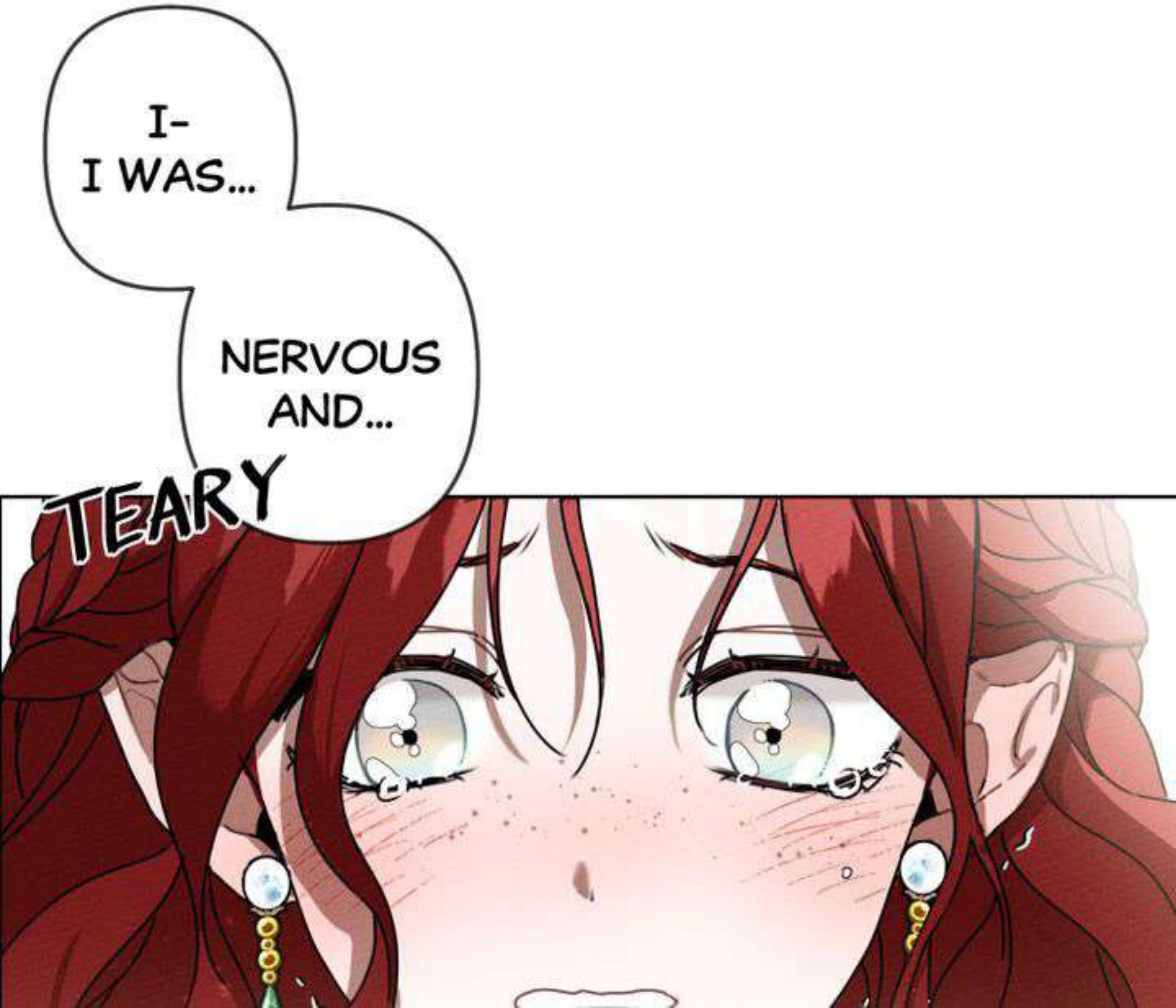

I'M DONE FOR IF HE LEAVES LIKE THIS.


FREEZE

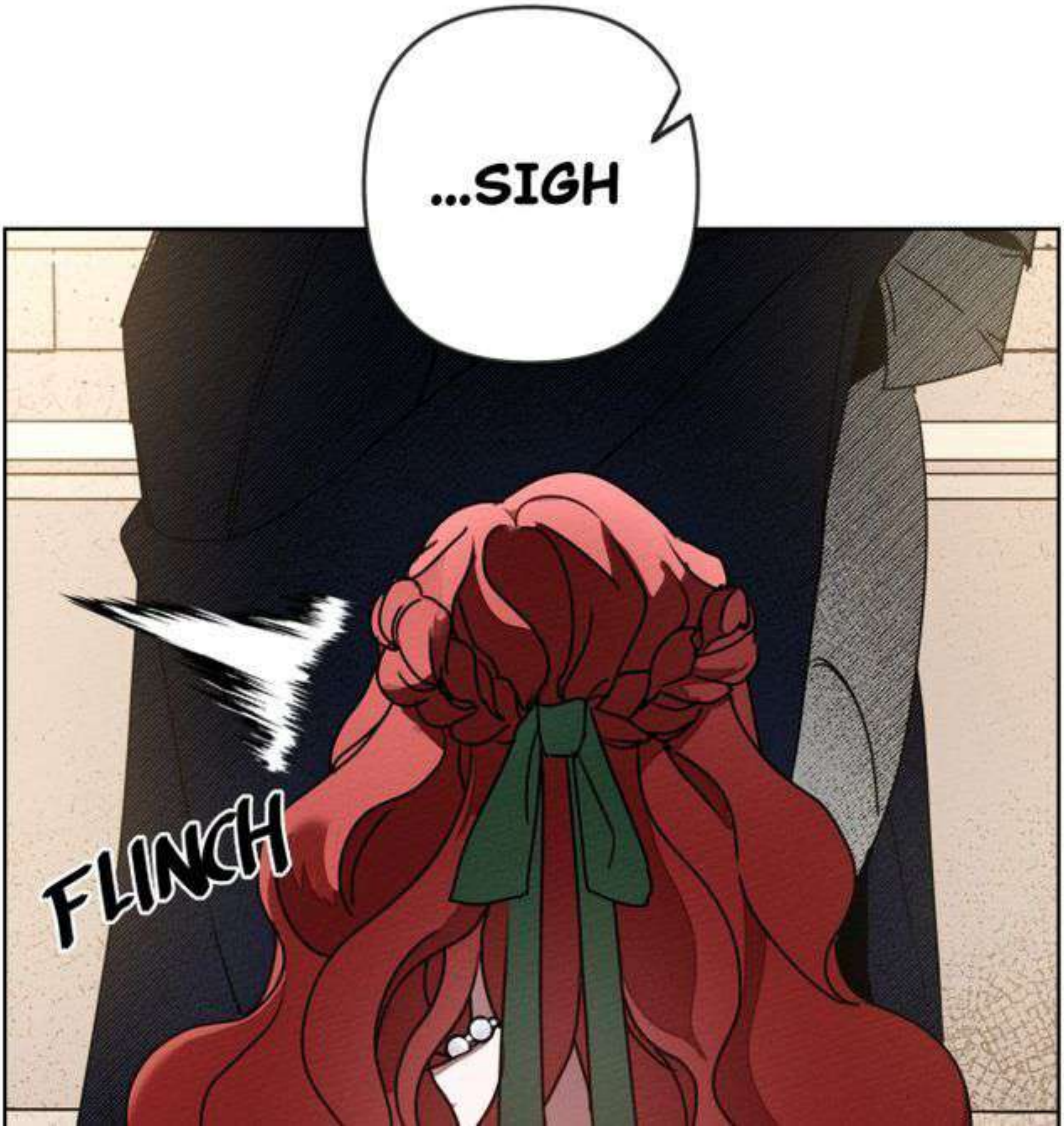
N-

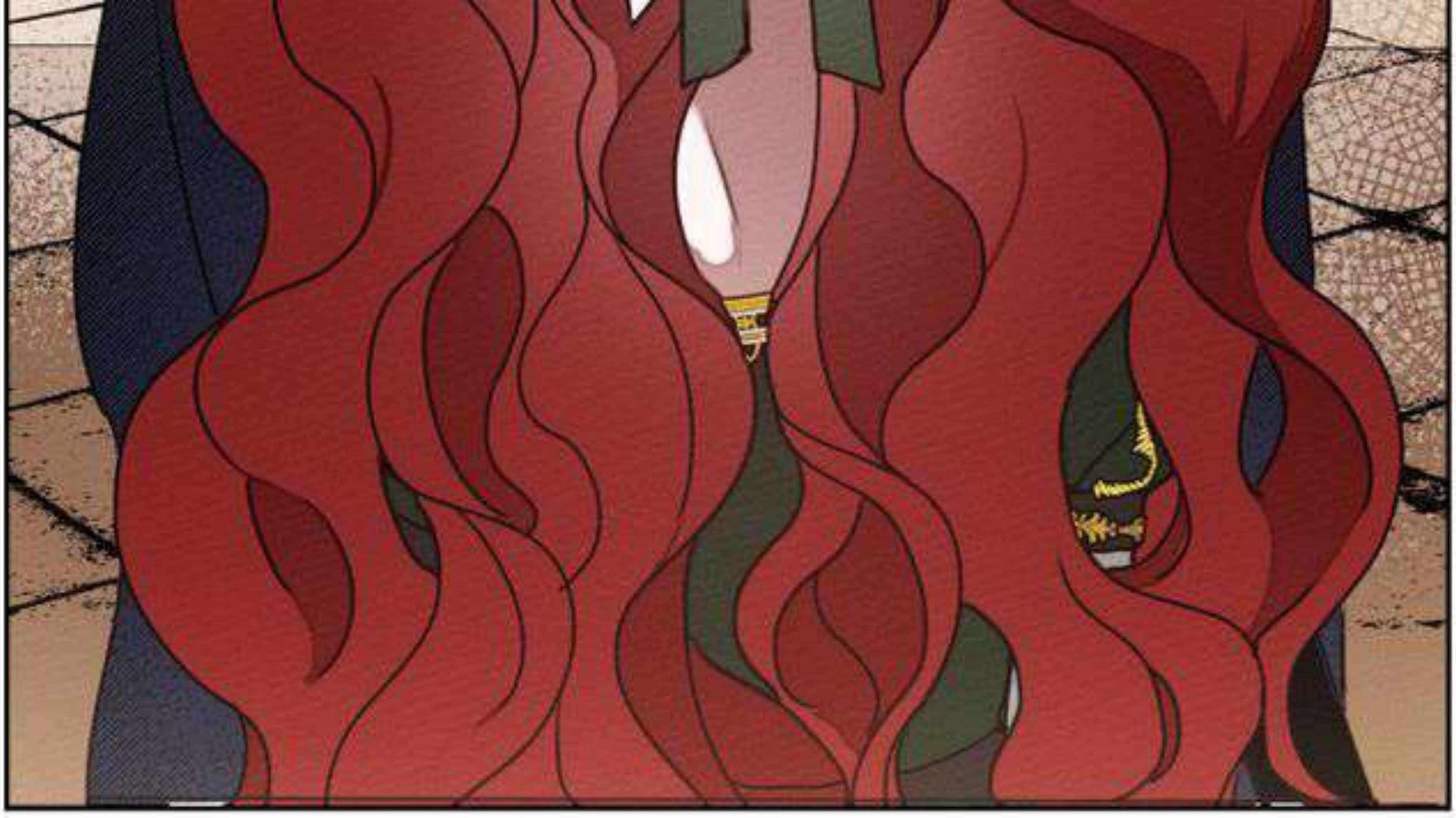
NO...

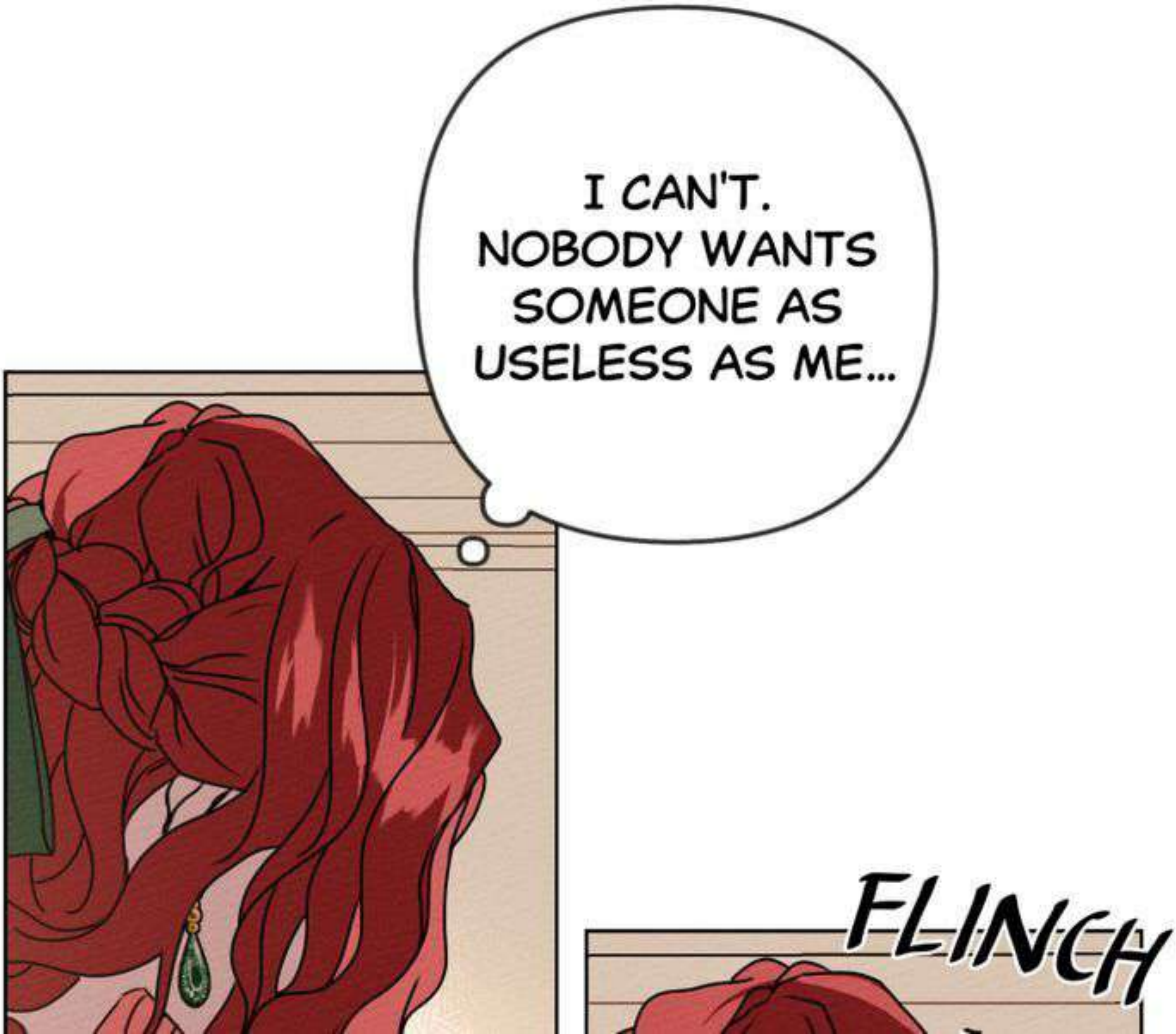
TILT

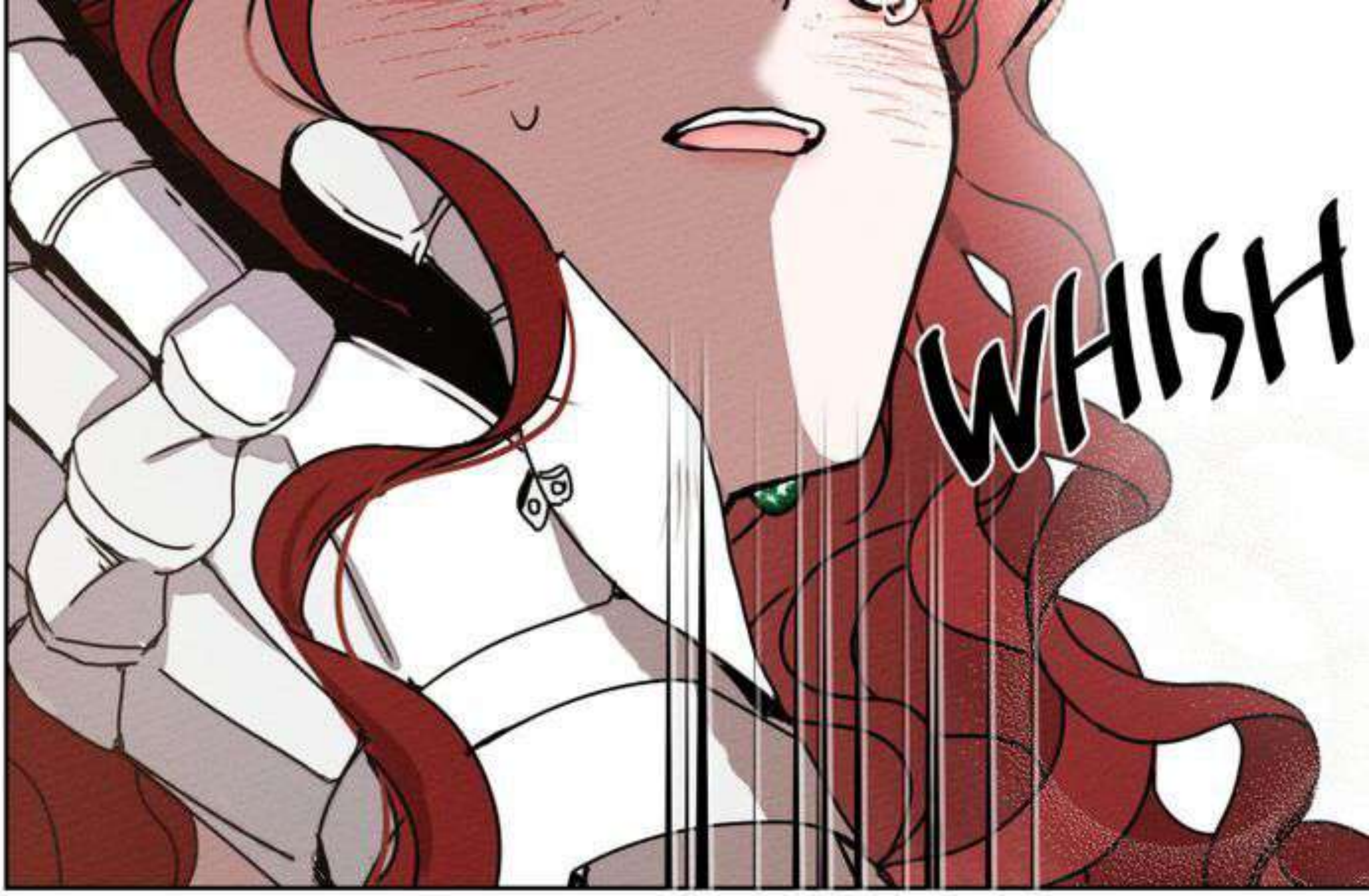

I-
I WAS...
NERVOUS
AND...
TEARY

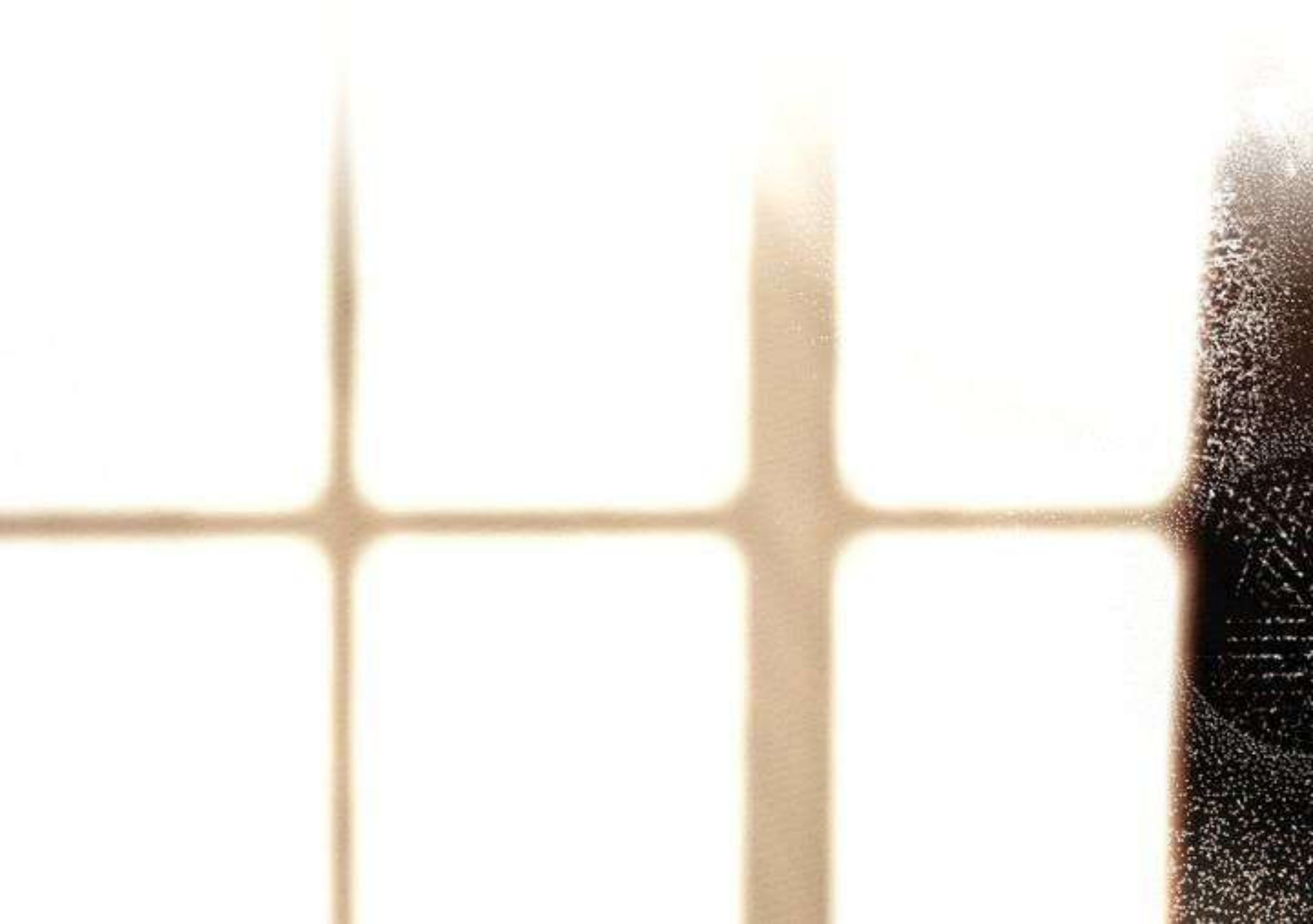
TEARY
D-DIDN'T KNOW W-WHAT T-TO SAY.

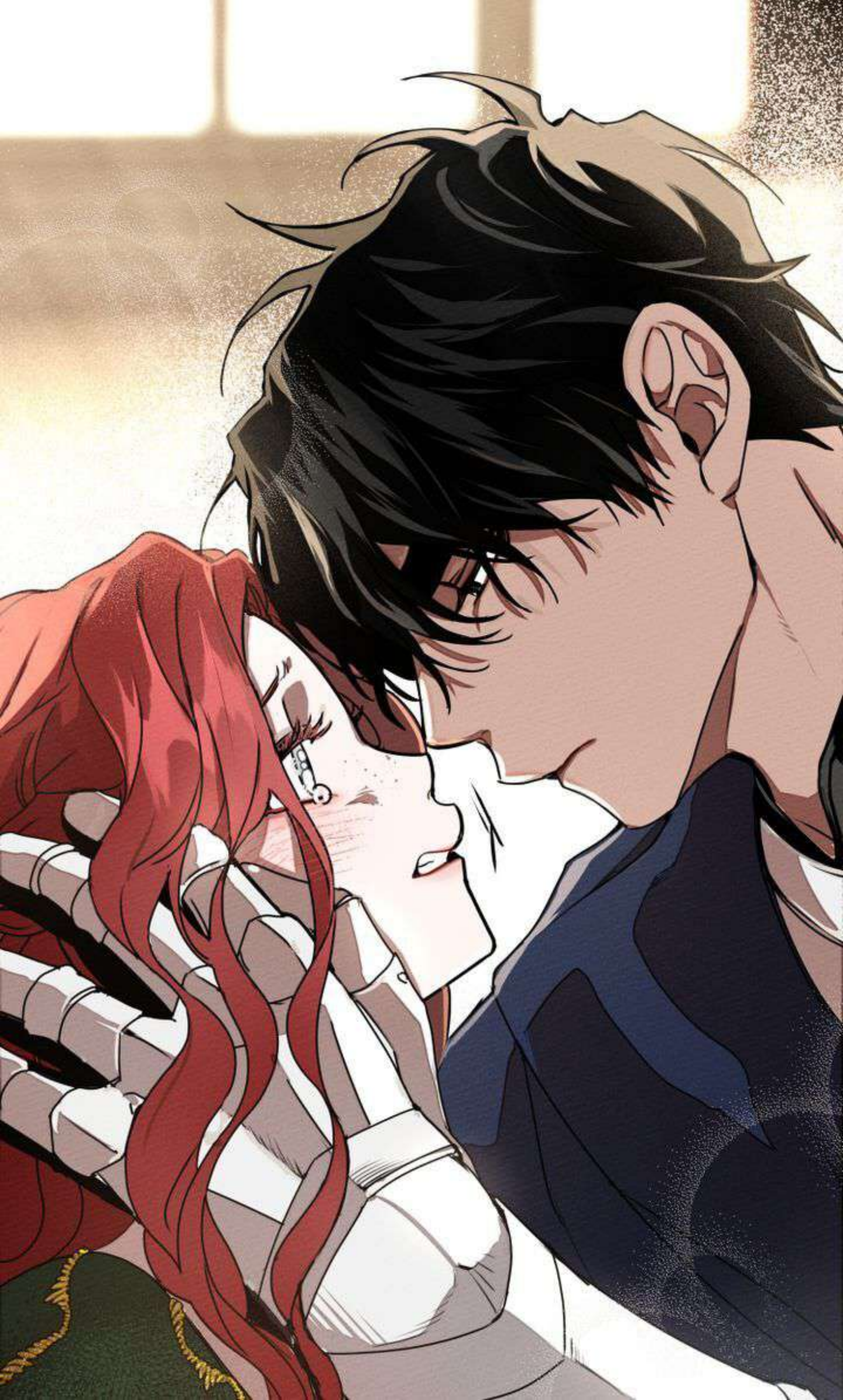

...SIGH
FLINCH

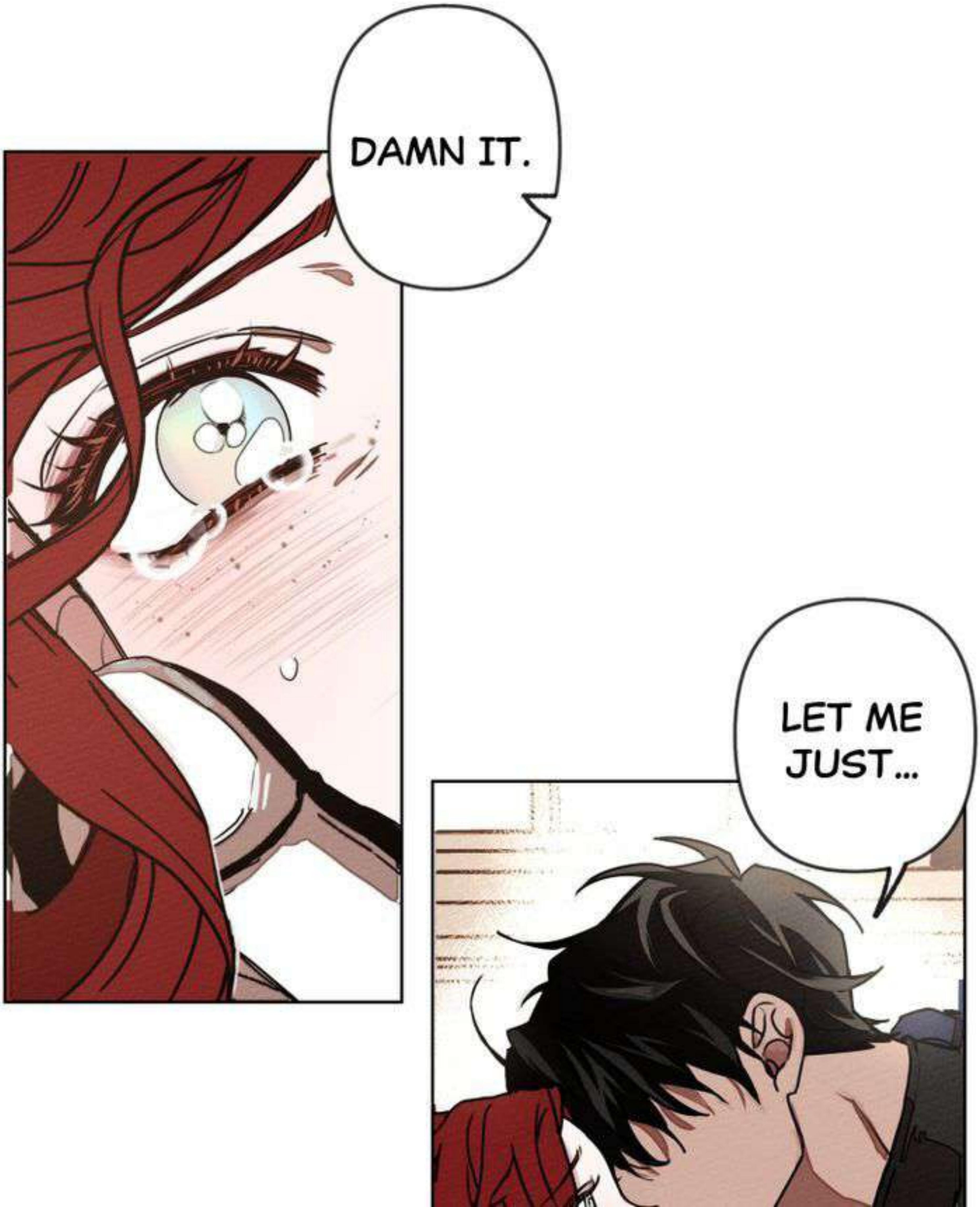


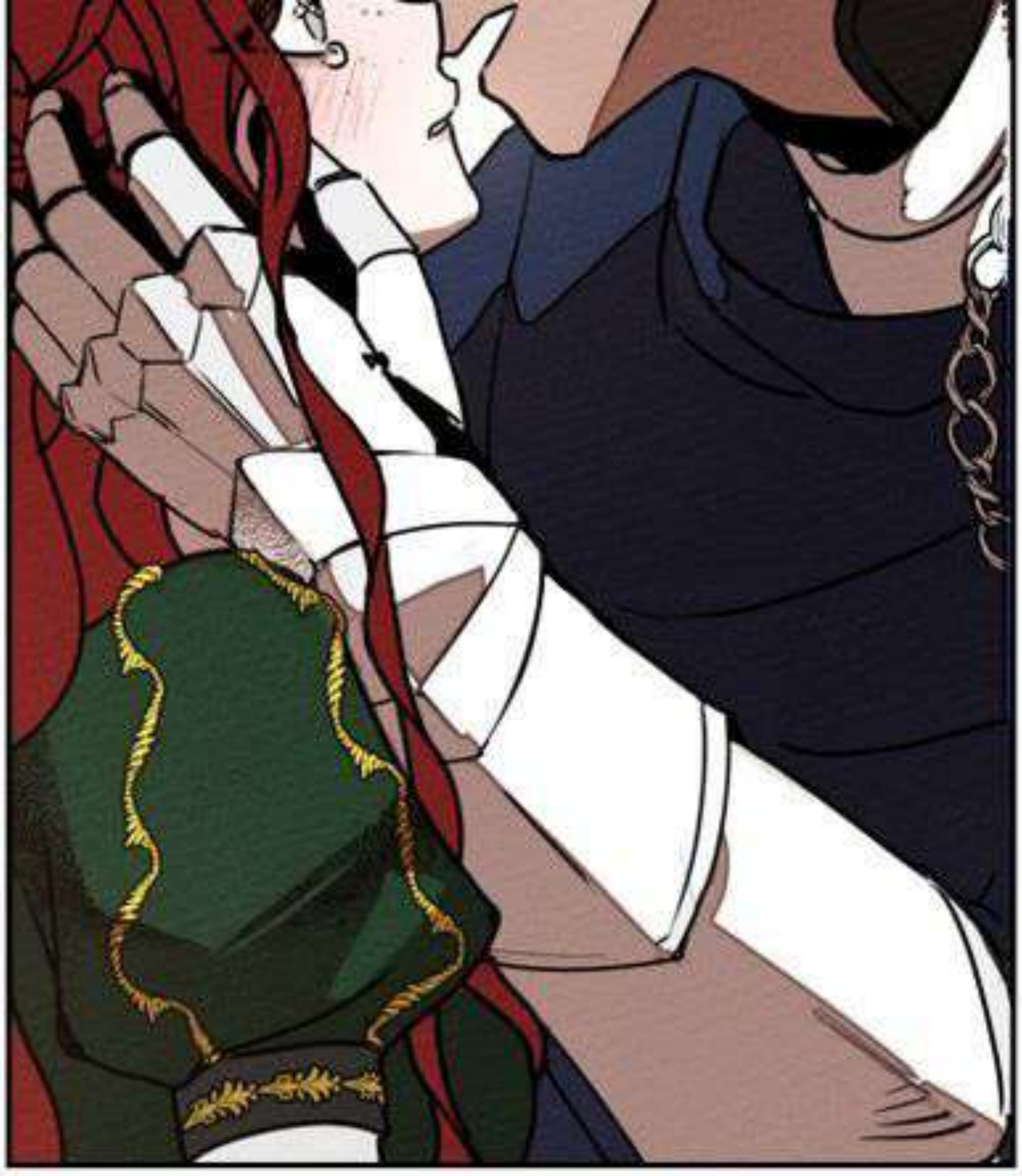

I CAN'T.
NOBODY WANTS SOMEONE AS USELESS AS ME...
FLINCH


WHISH

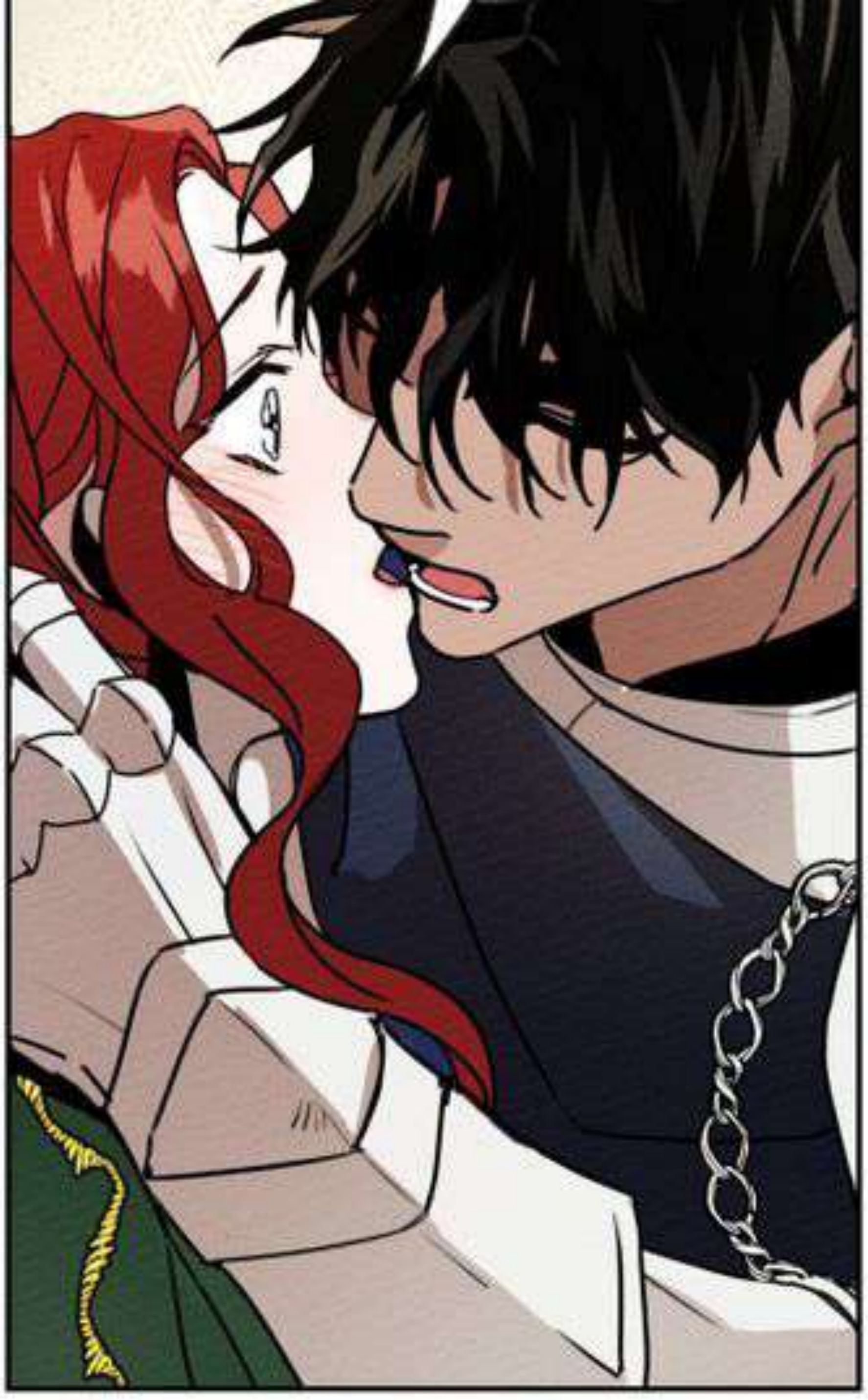


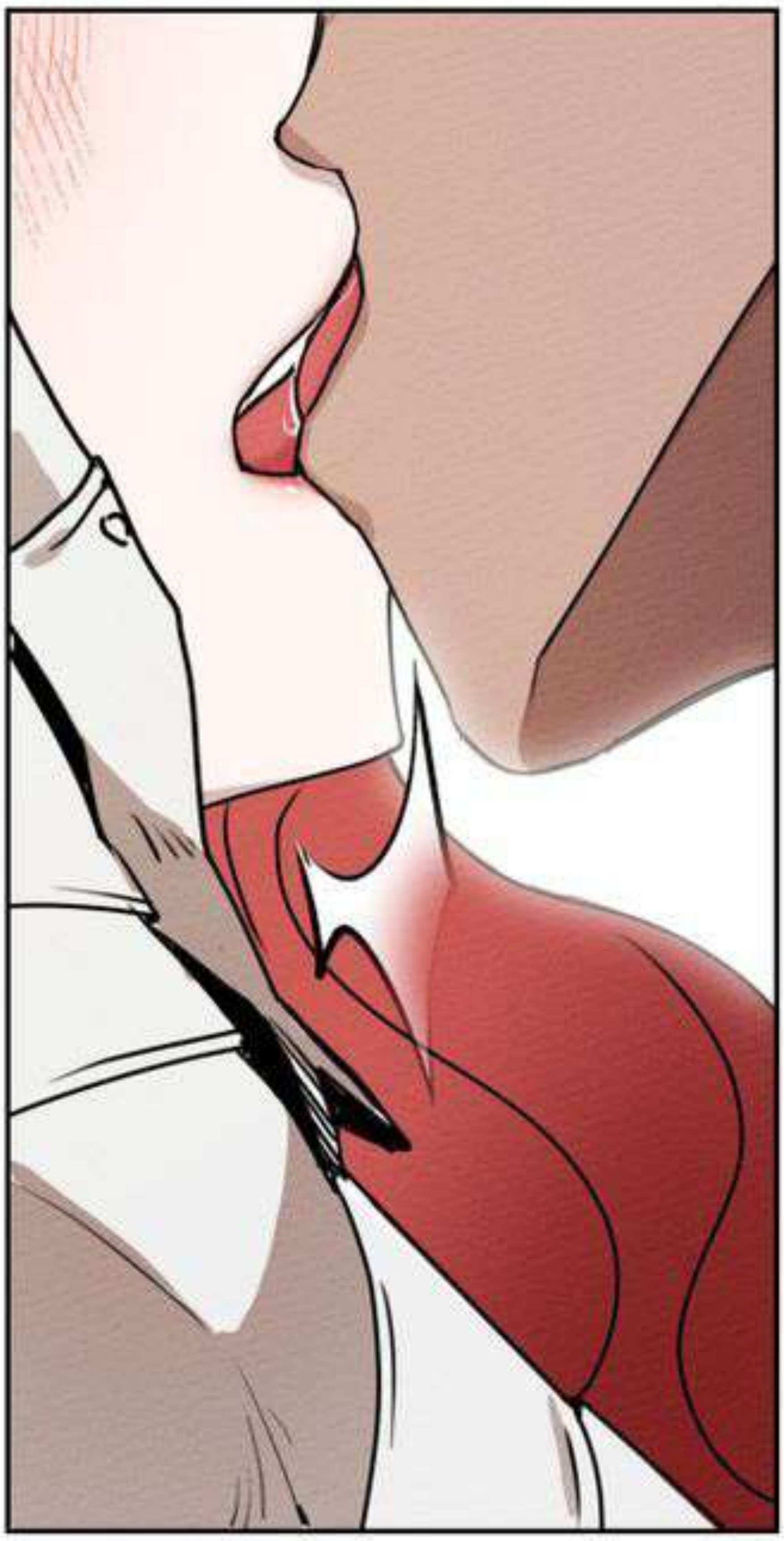


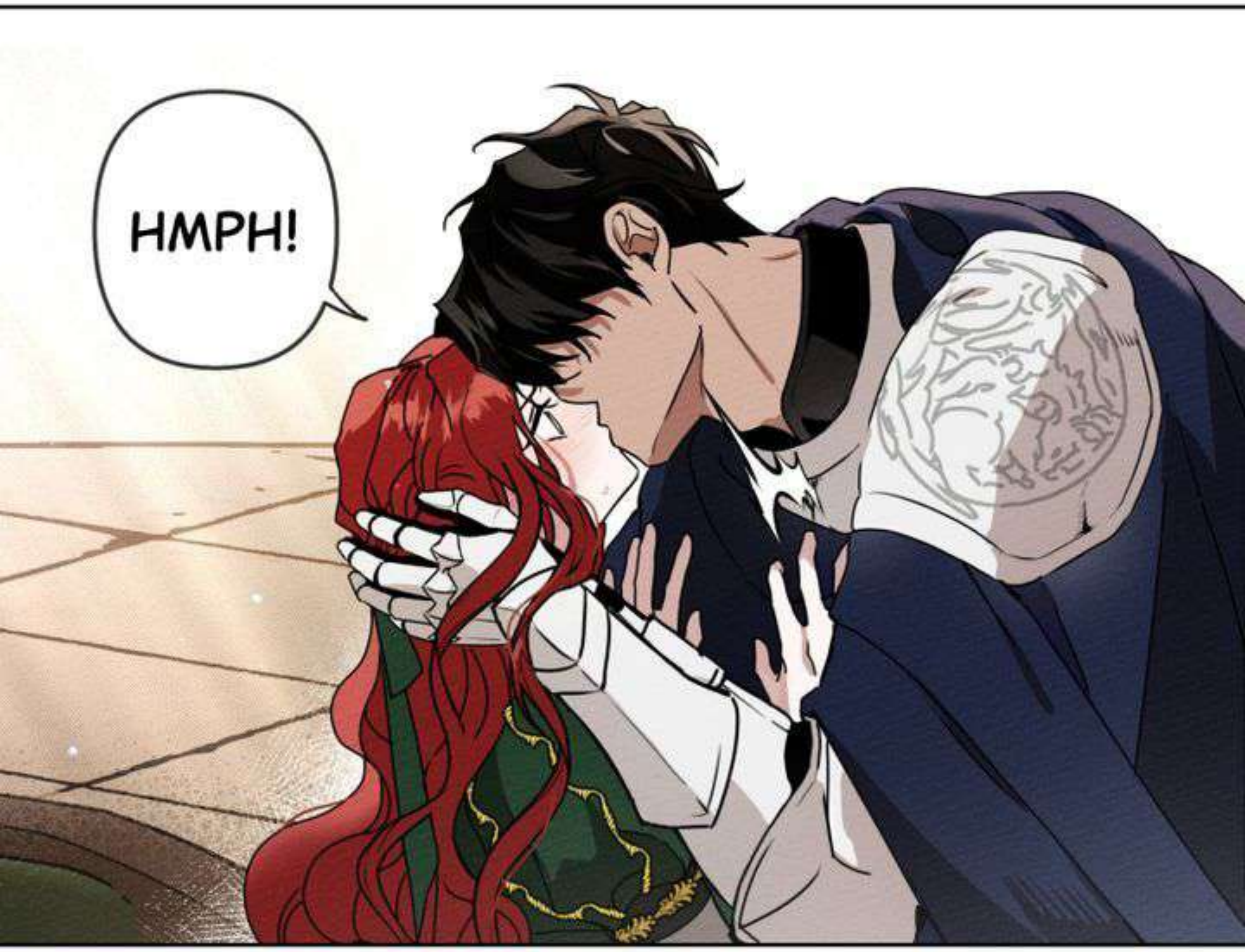

DAMN IT.
LET ME JUST...

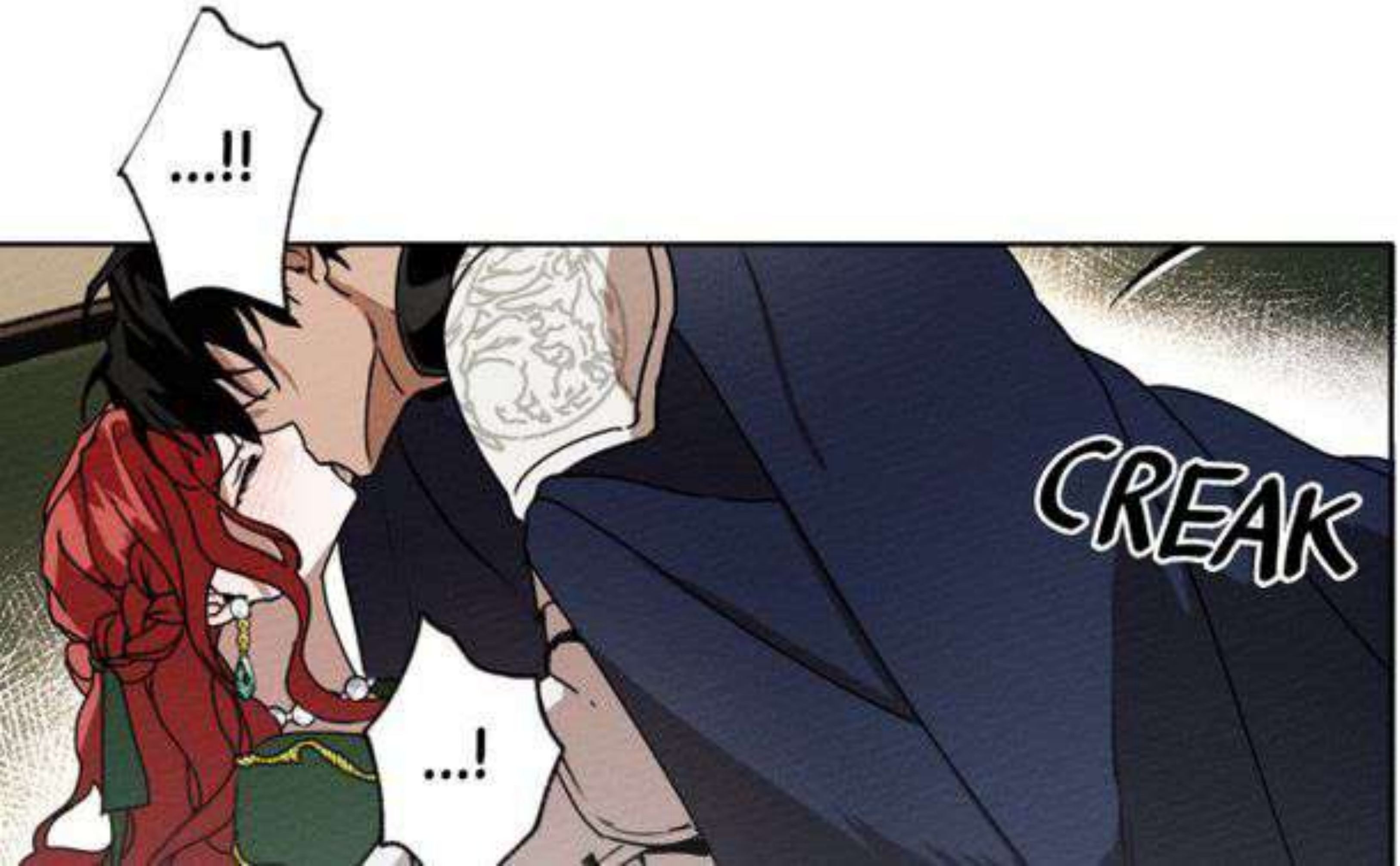


P-
PARDON?

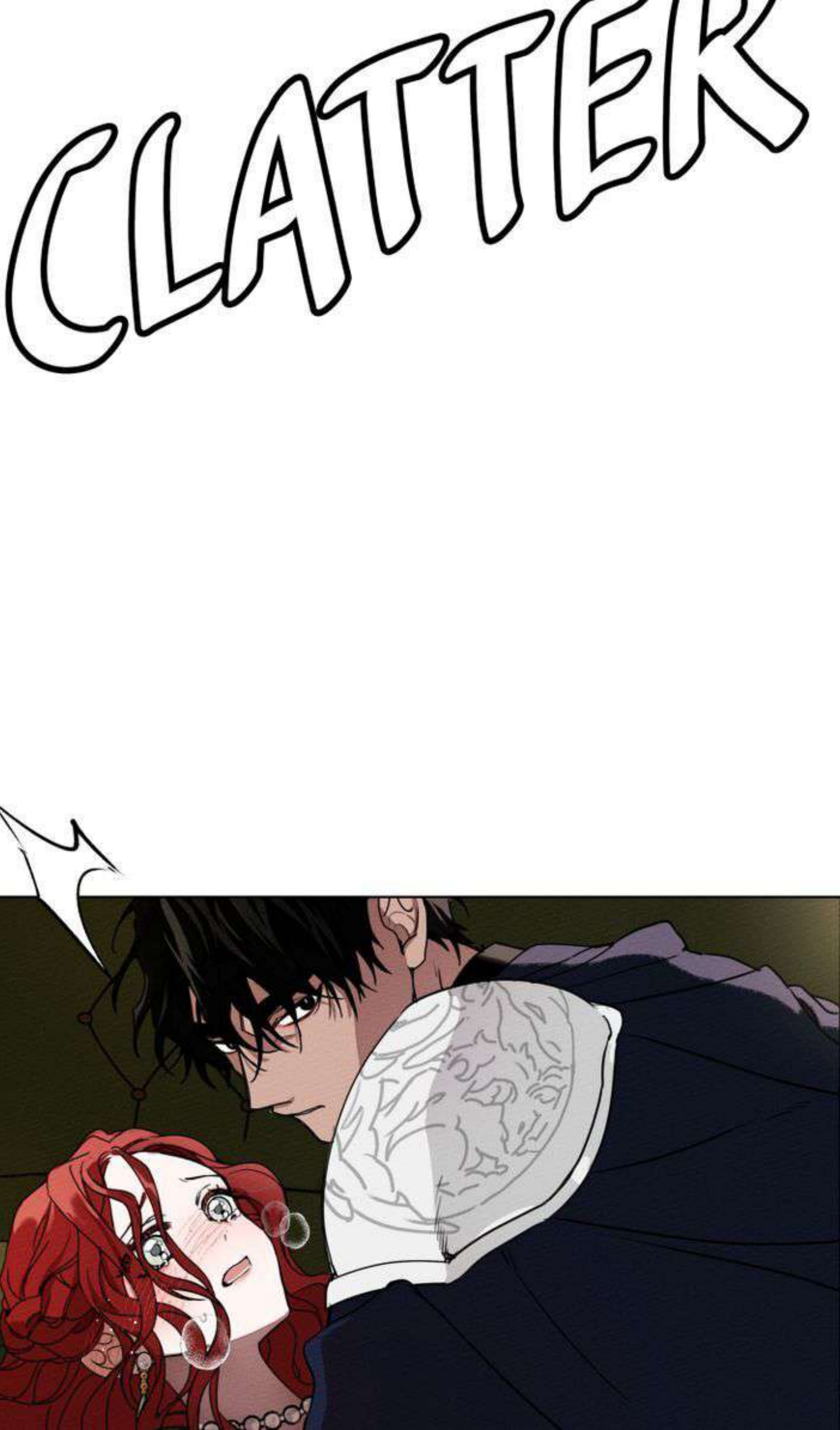




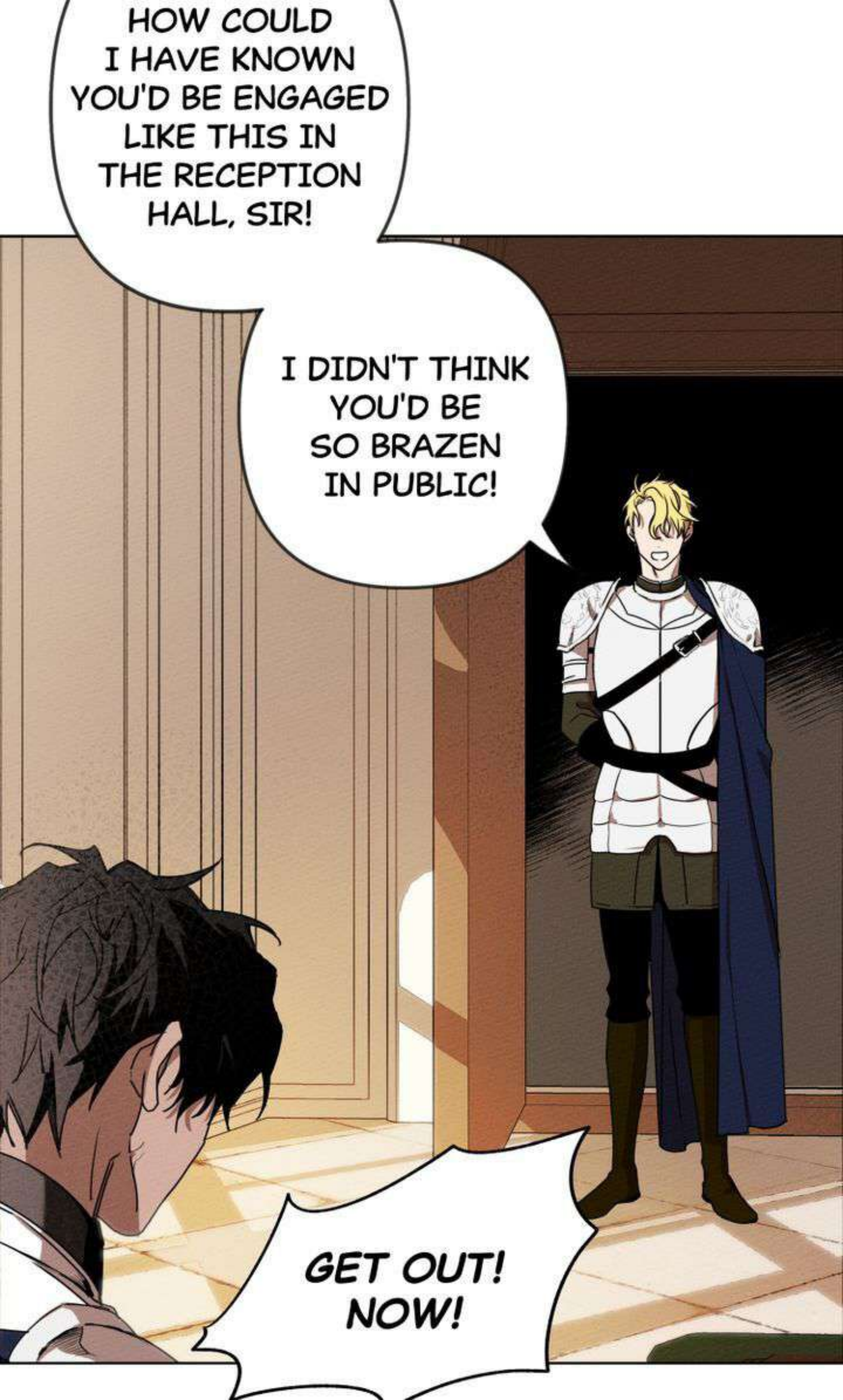

HMPH!

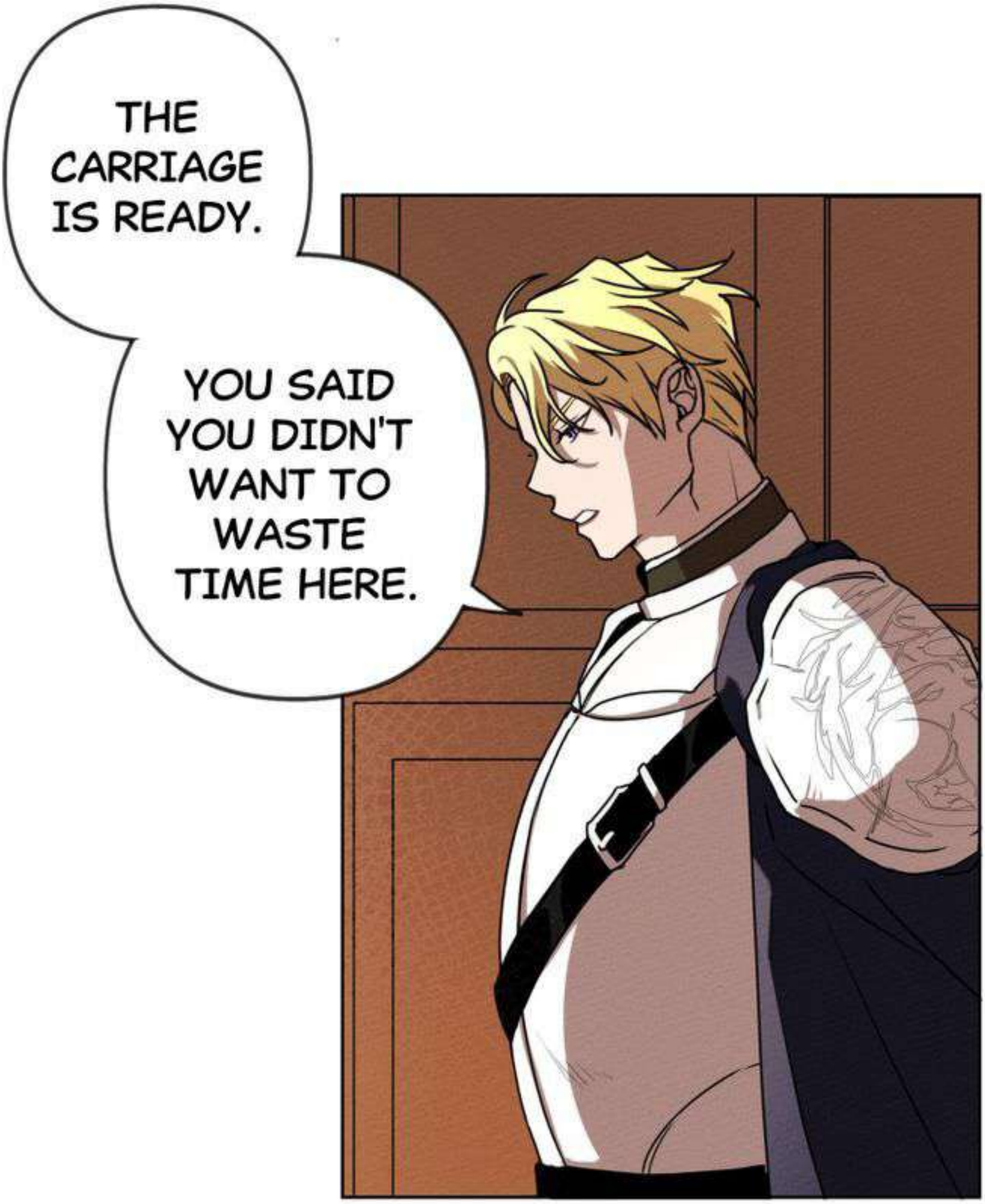

...!!
CREAK
...!

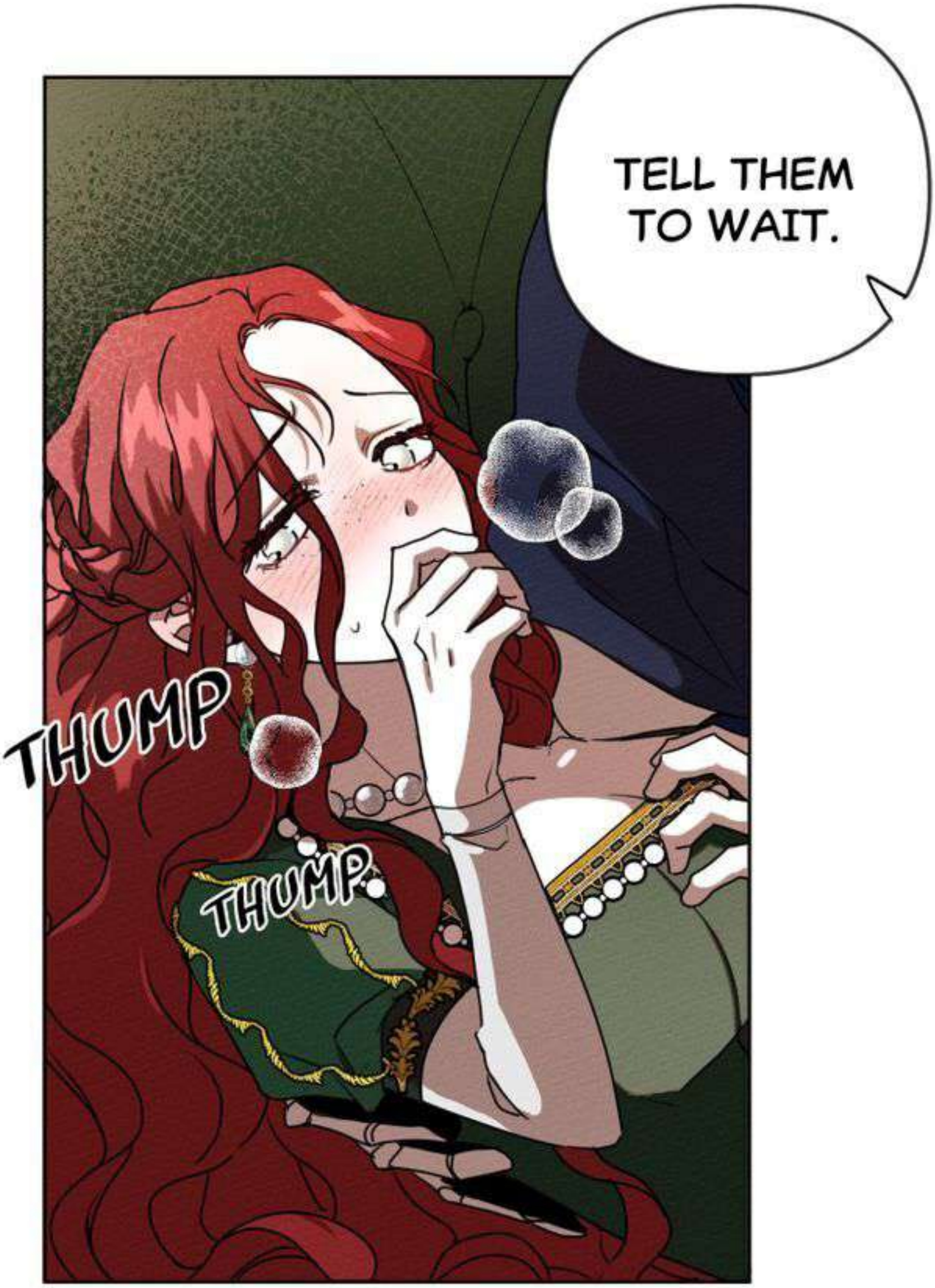
I'M SCARED!

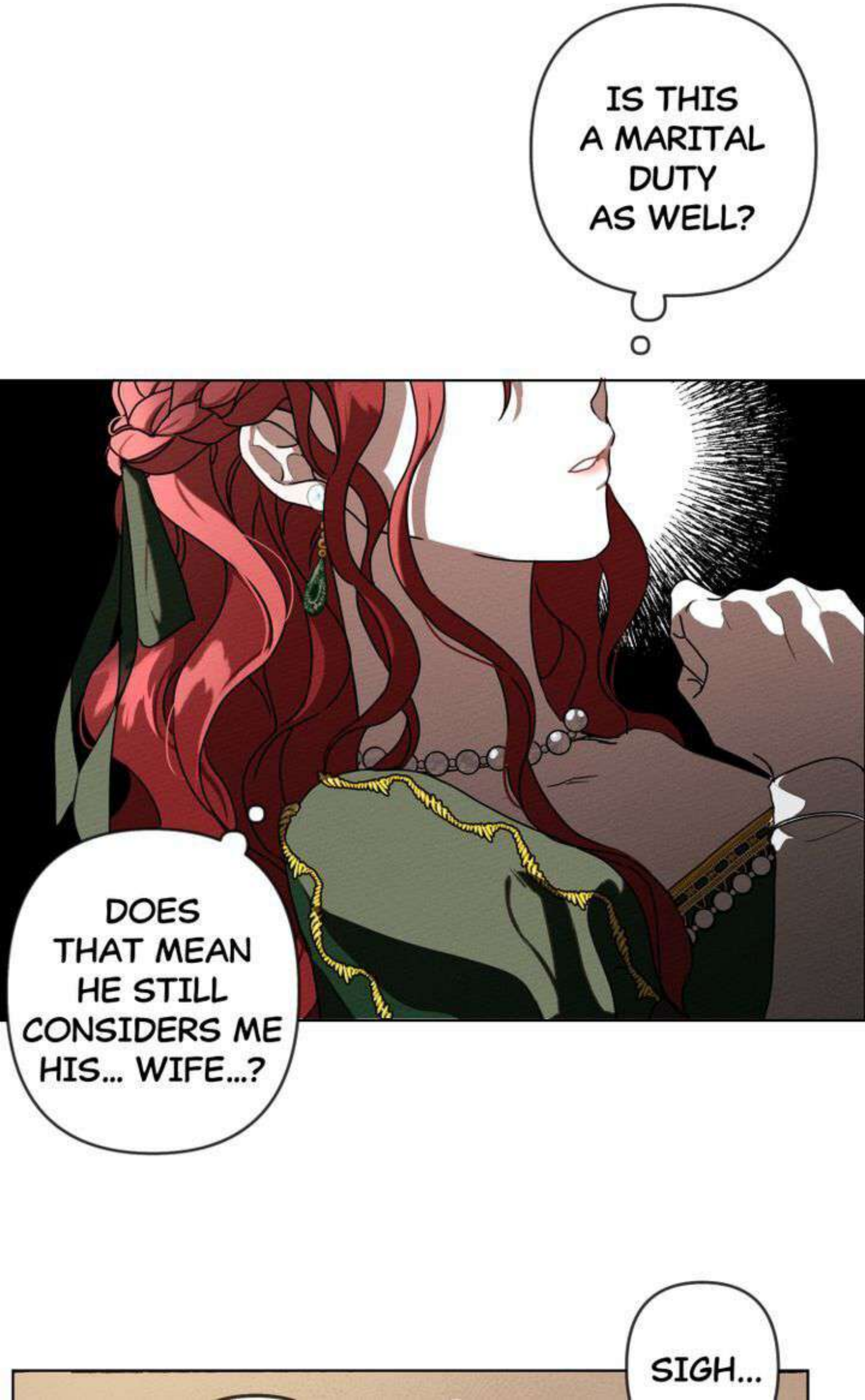

CLATTER

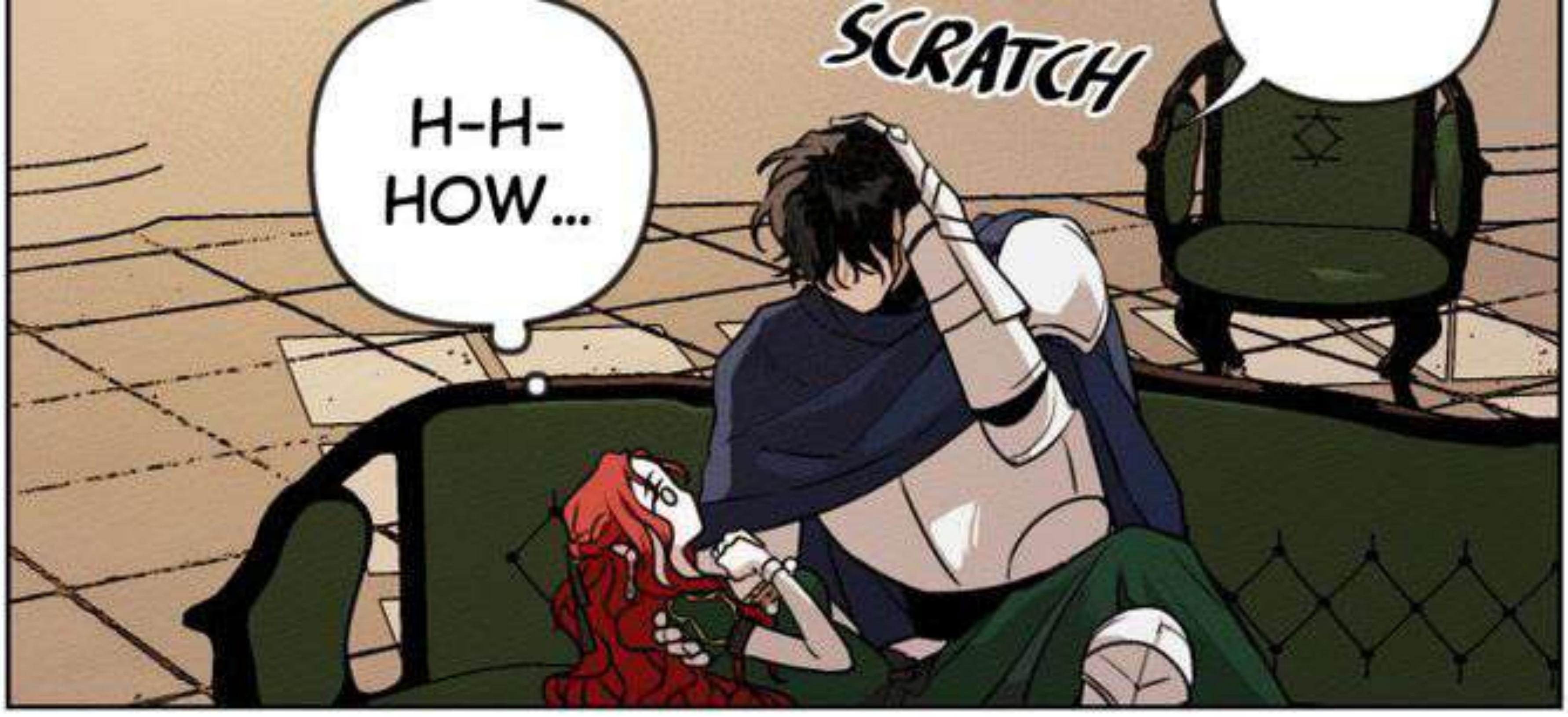
WHY ARE YOU PEEPING LIKE A RAT!

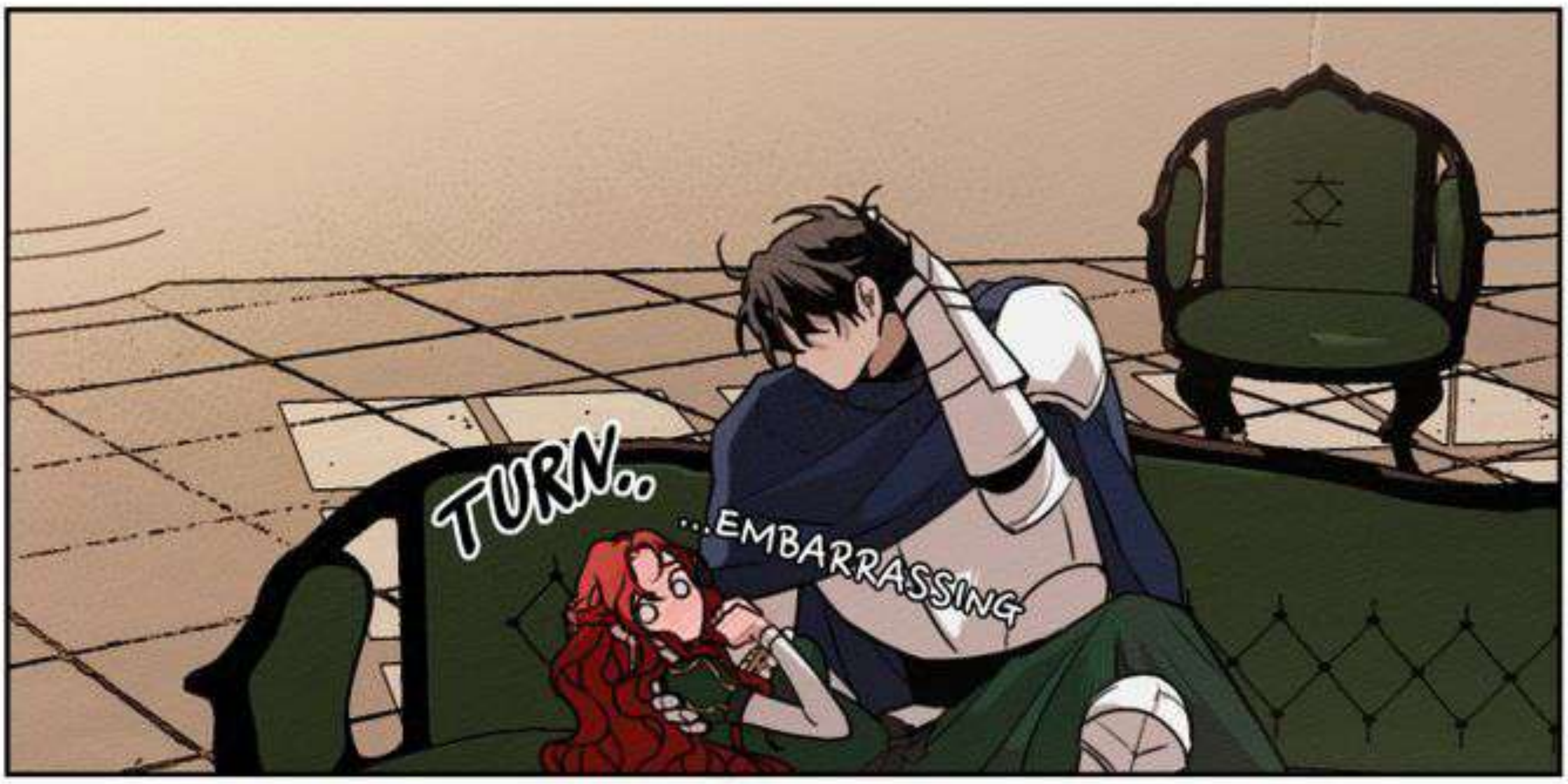

HOW COULD I HAVE KNOWN YOU'D BE ENGAGED LIKE THIS IN THE RECEPTION HALL, SIR!
I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D BE SO BRAZEN IN PUBLIC!
GET OUT! NOW!

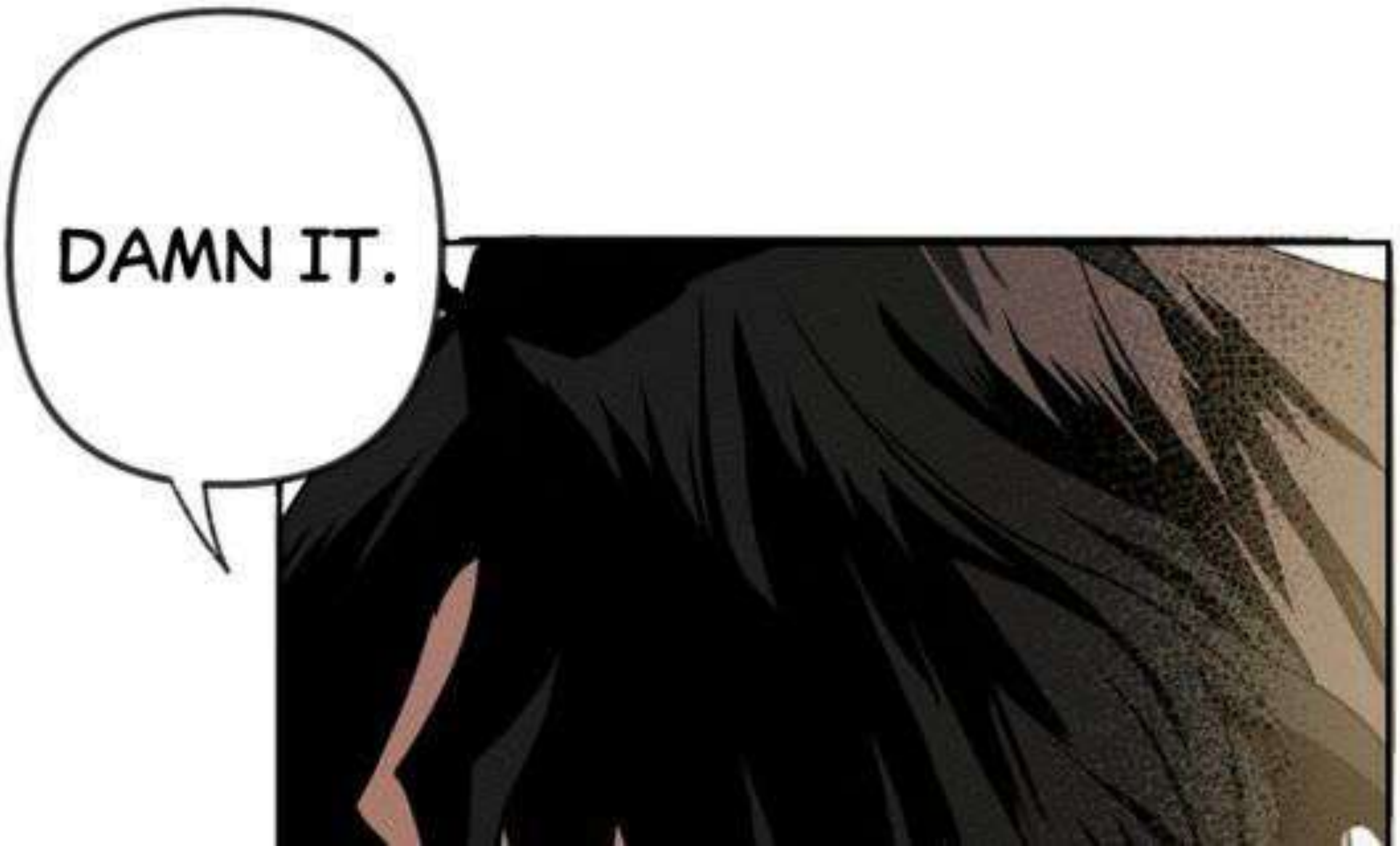

THE CARRIAGE IS READY.
YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T WANT TO WASTE TIME HERE.

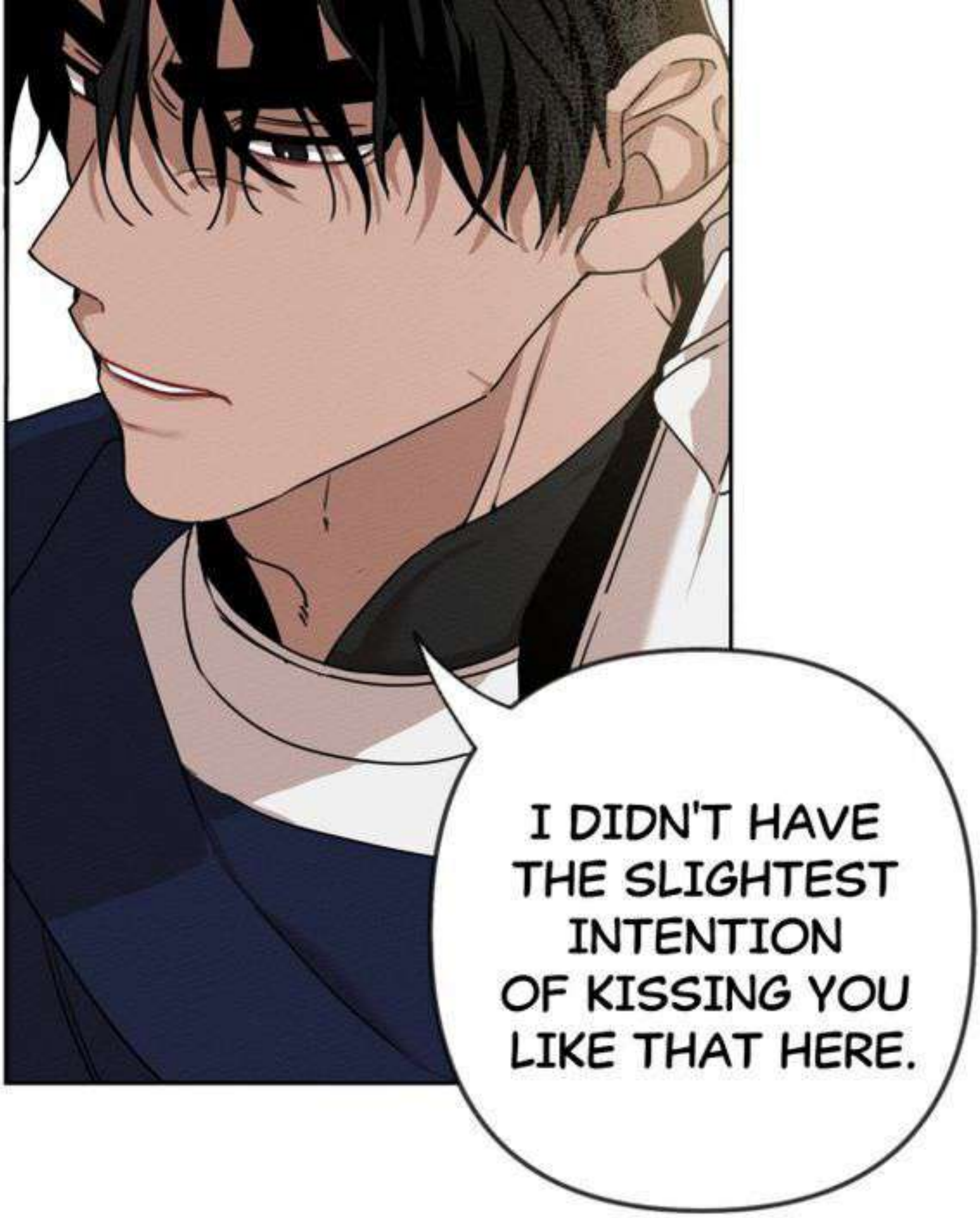

TELL THEM TO WAIT.
THUMP
THUMP

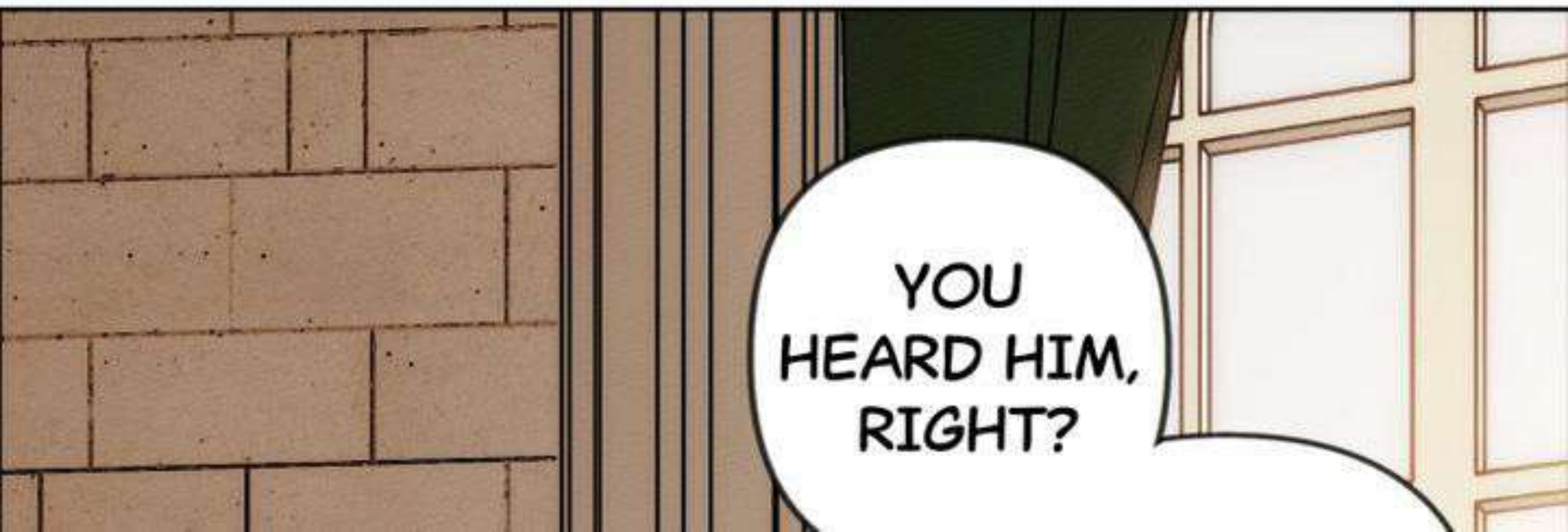

IS THIS A MARITAL DUTY AS WELL?
DOES THAT MEAN HE STILL CONSIDERS ME HIS... WIFE...?
SIGH...

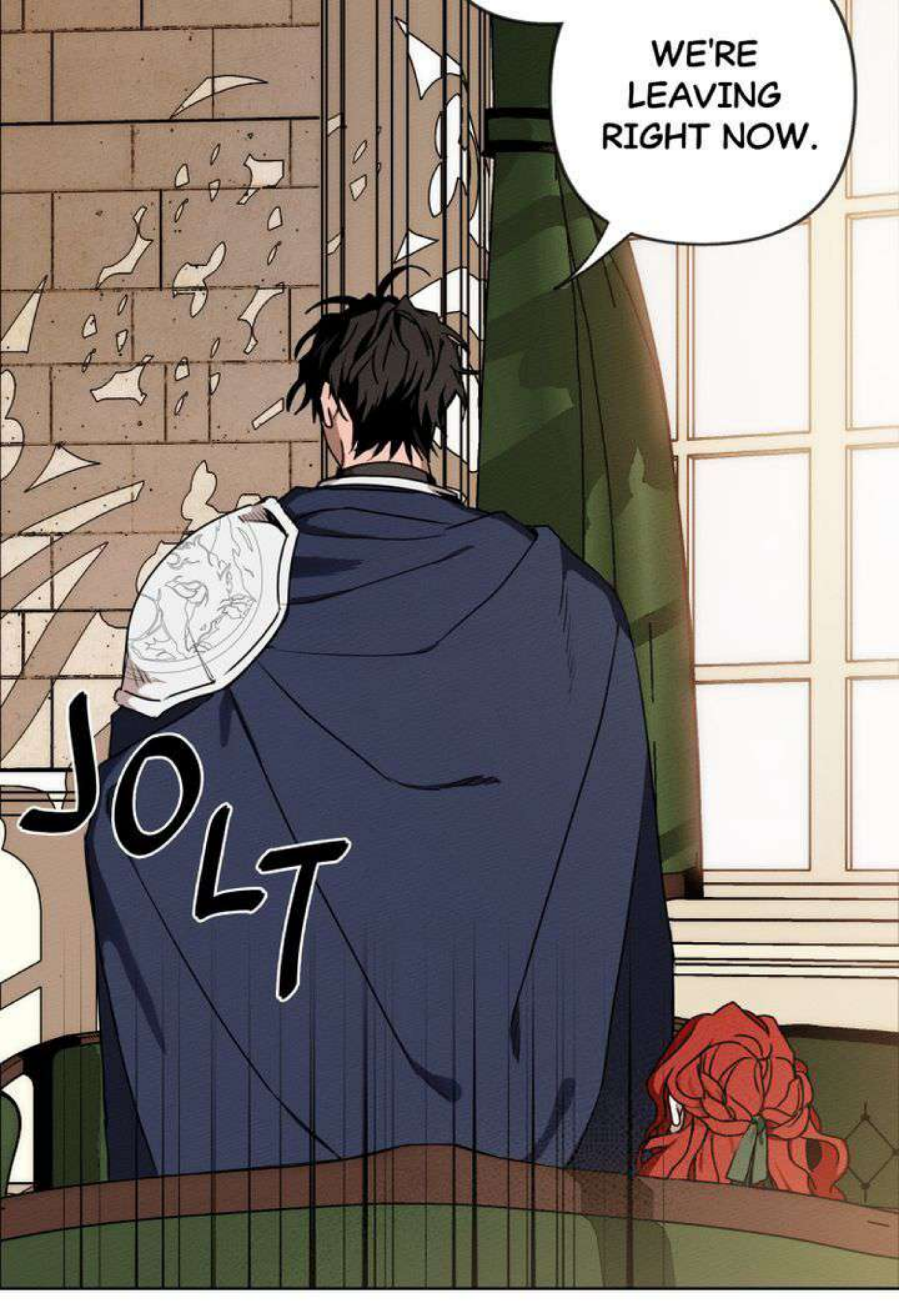

SCRATCH
H-H-HOW...

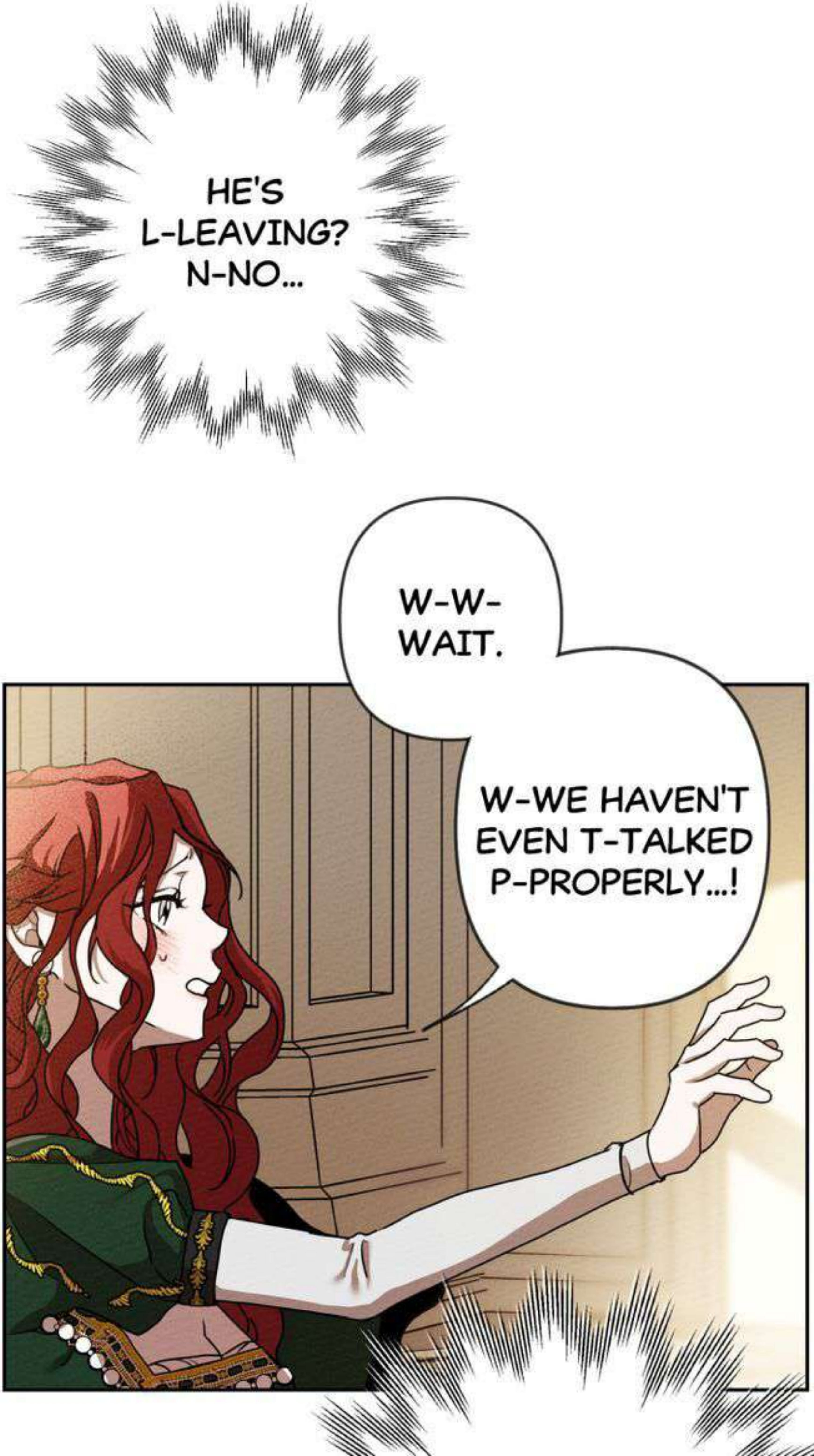

TURN..
...EMBARRASSING

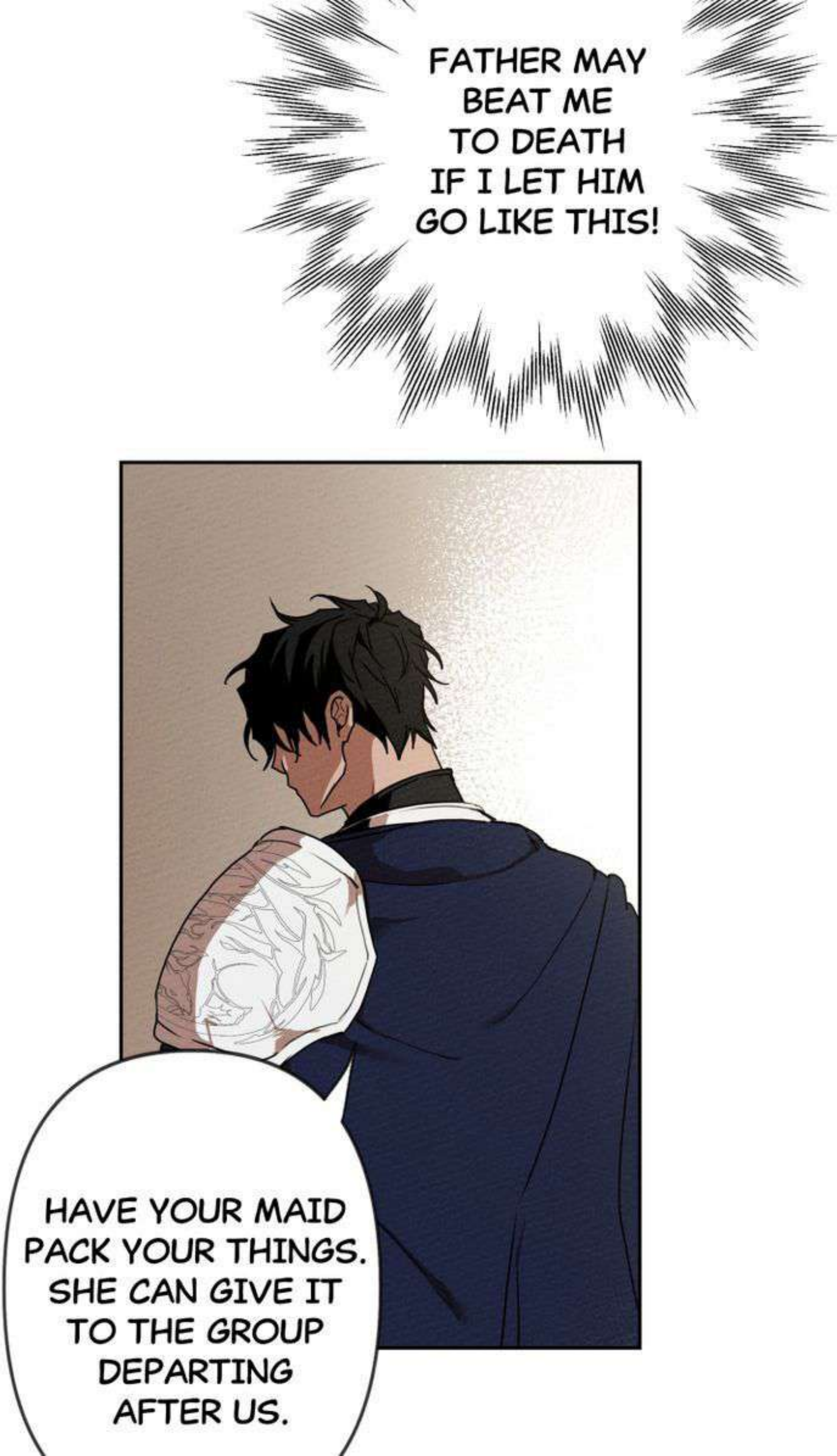

DAMN IT.

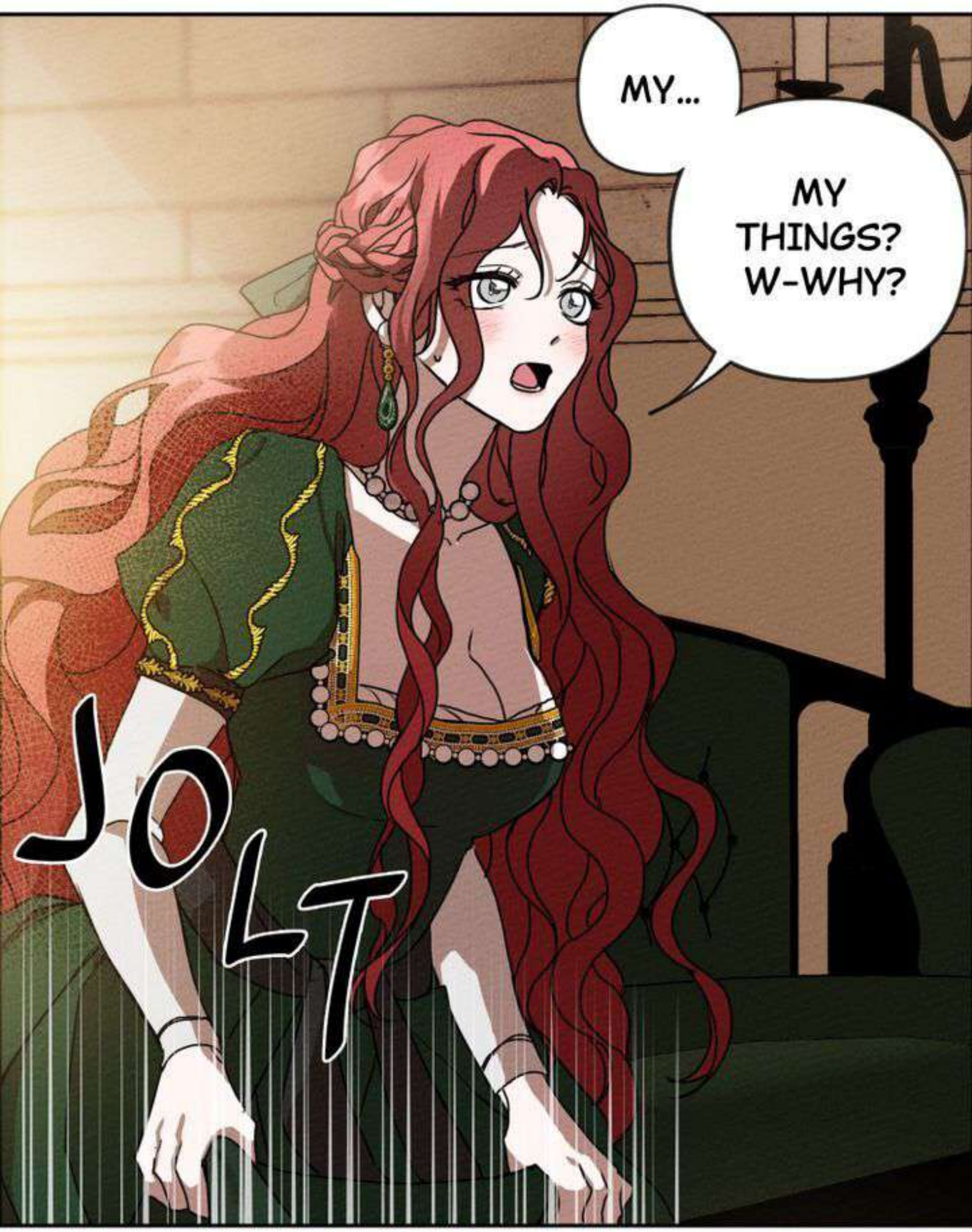

I DIDN'T HAVE THE SLIGHTEST INTENTION OF KISSING YOU LIKE THAT HERE.

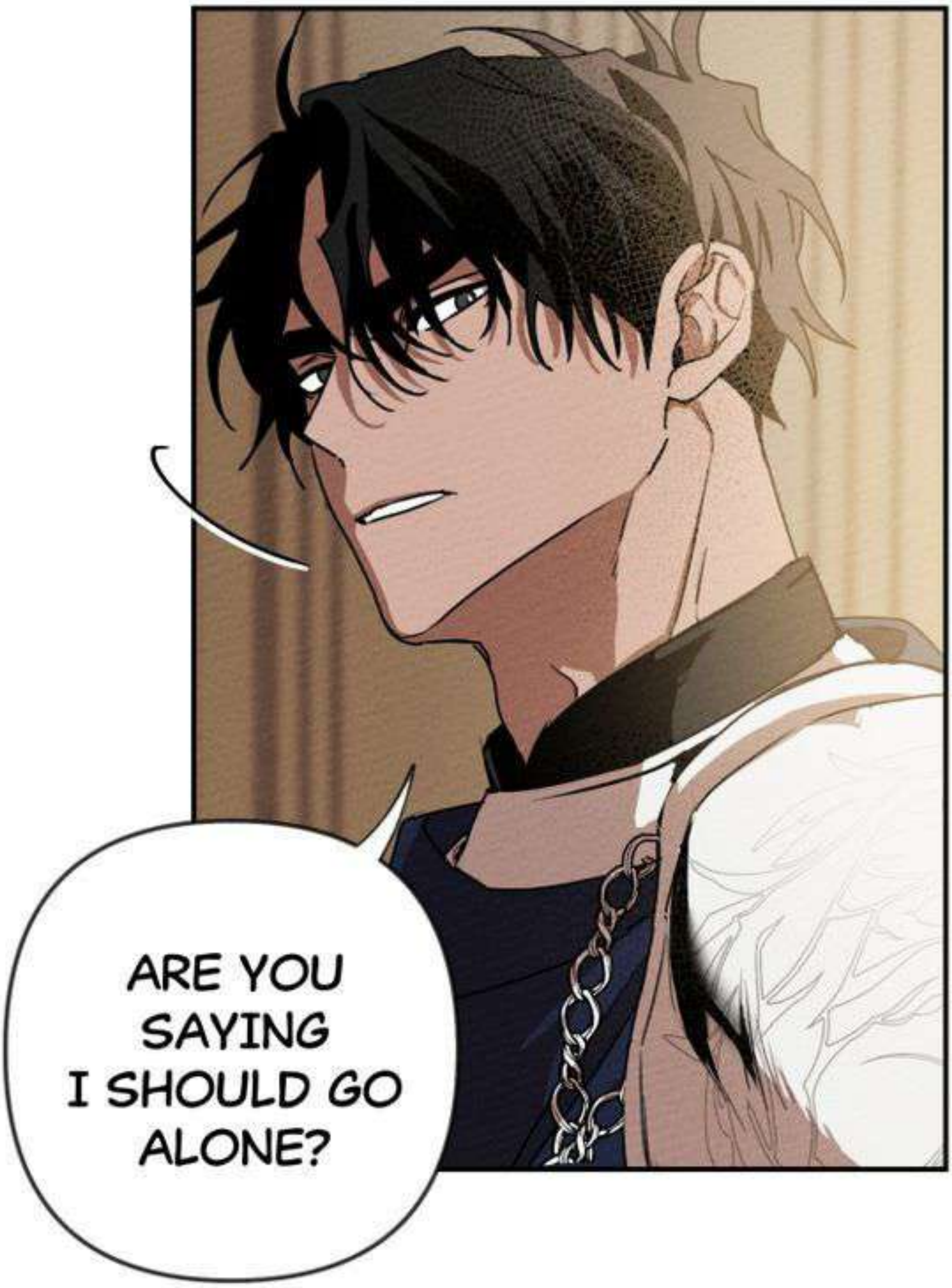

YOU HEARD HIM, RIGHT?


WE'RE LEAVING RIGHT NOW.
JOLT

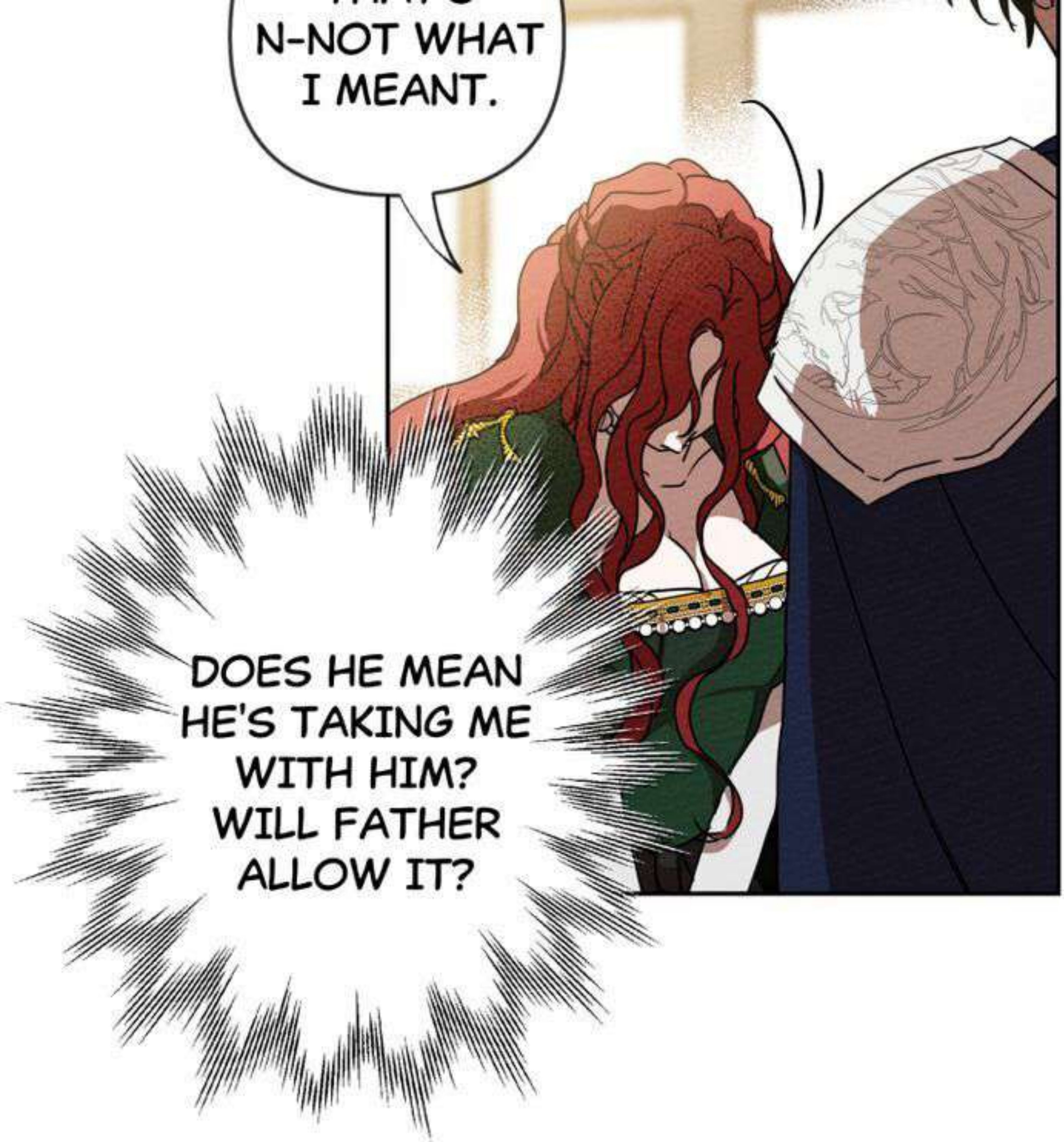

HE'S L-LEAVING? N-NO...
W-W-WAIT.
W-WE HAVEN'T EVEN T-TALKED P-PROPERLY...!

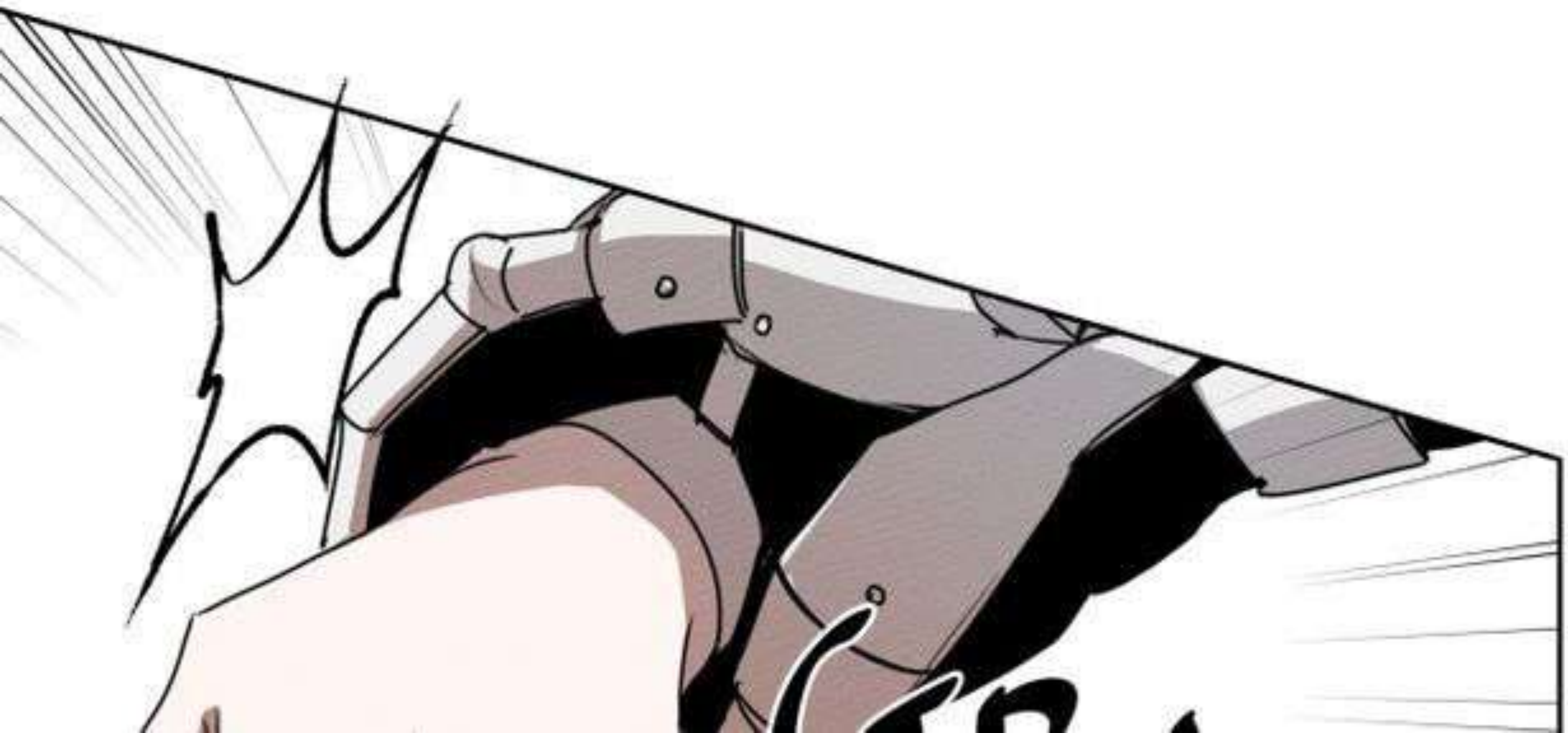

FATHER MAY BEAT ME TO DEATH IF I LET HIM GO LIKE THIS!
HAVE YOUR MAID PACK YOUR THINGS. SHE CAN GIVE IT TO THE GROUP DEPARTING AFTER US.

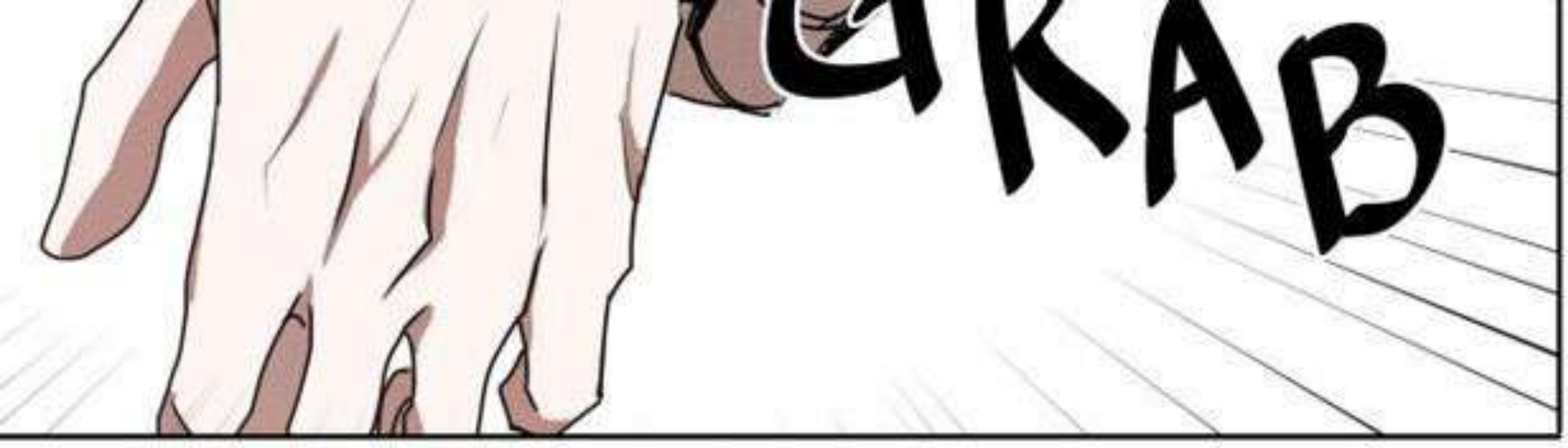

MY...
MY THINGS? W-WHY?
JOLT

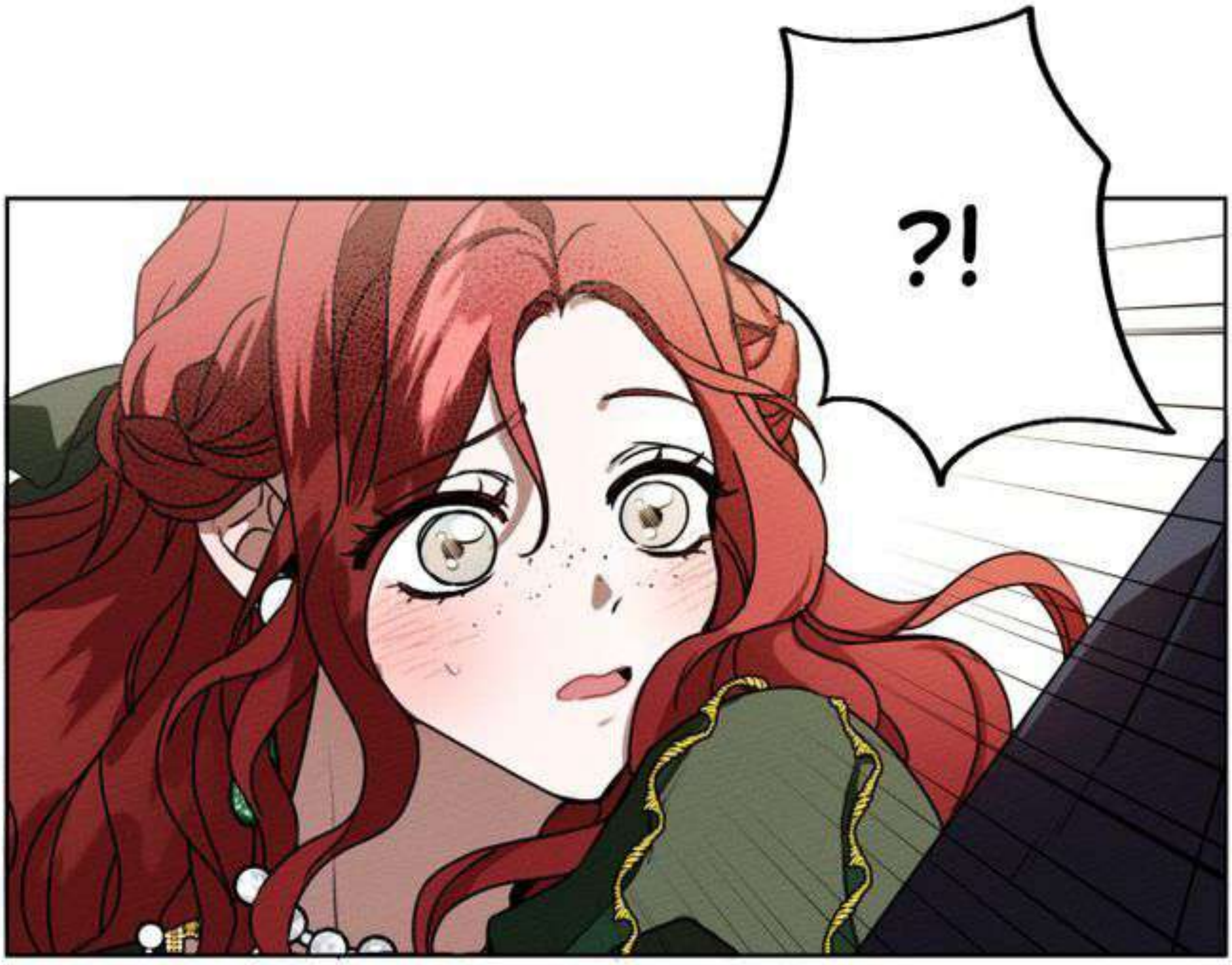

ARE YOU SAYING I SHOULD GO ALONE?

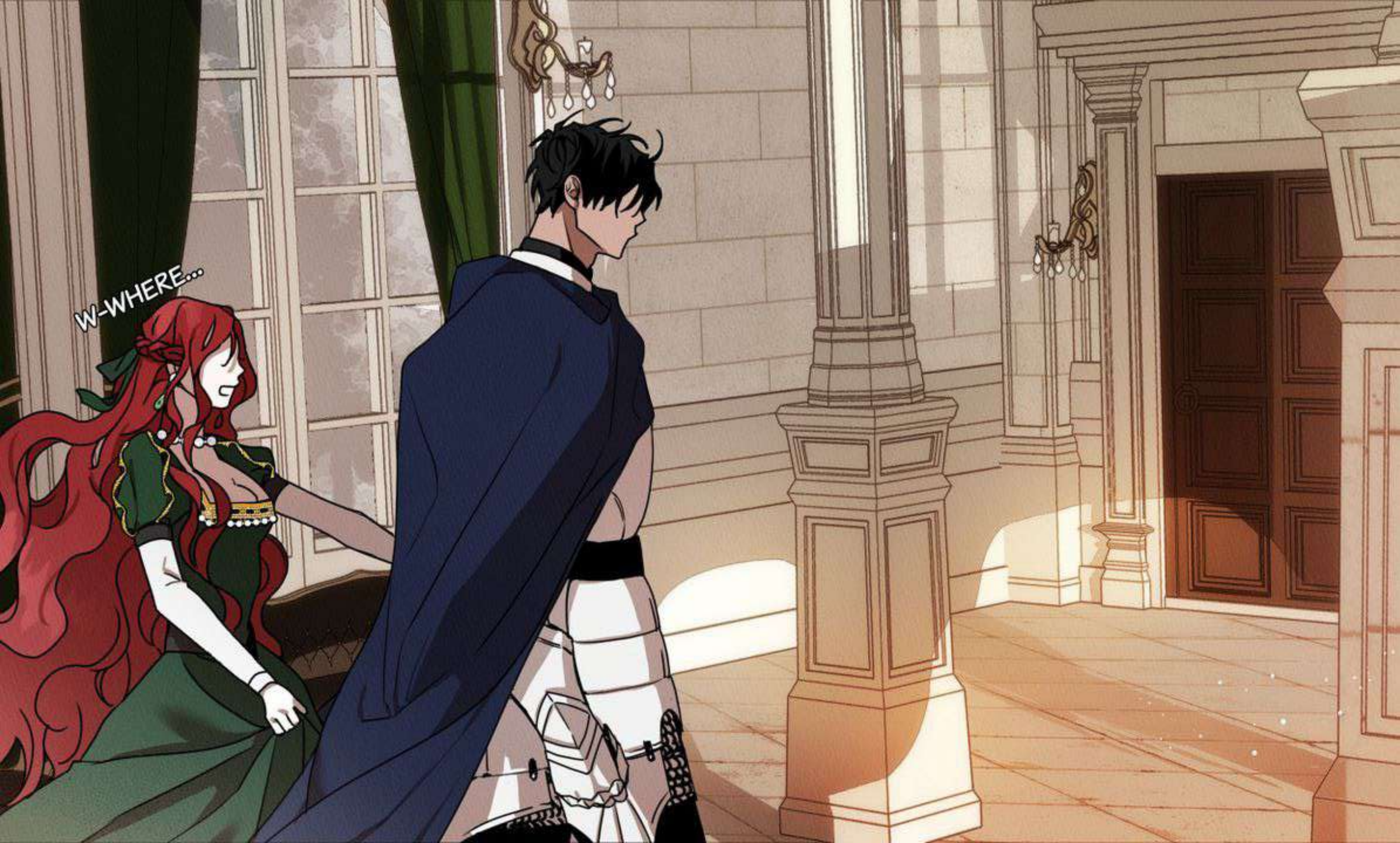
N-N-NO... THAT'S

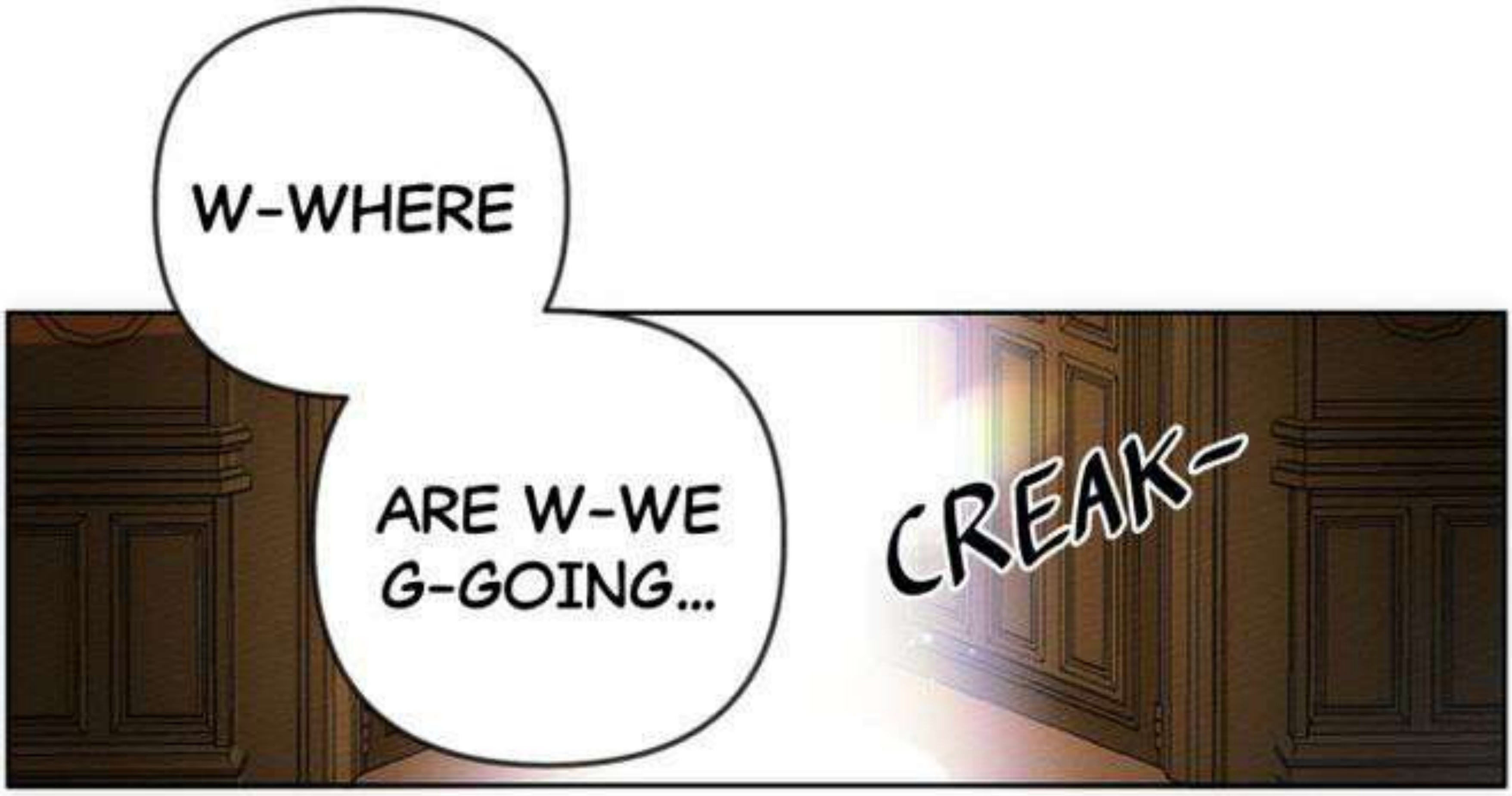

N-NOT WHAT I MEANT.
DOES HE MEAN HE'S TAKING ME WITH HIM? WILL FATHER ALLOW IT?



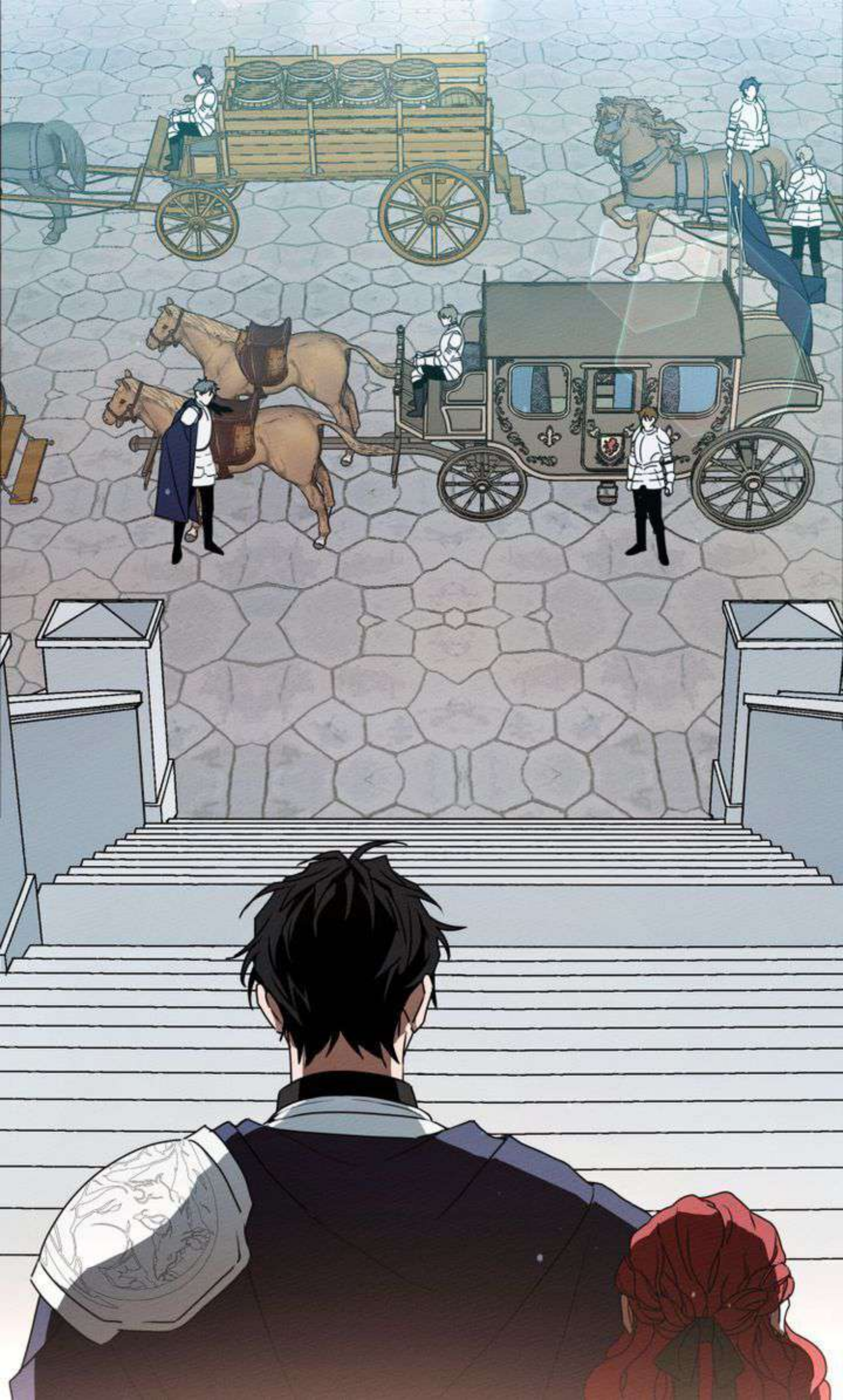

GRAB


?!


W-WHERE...


W-WHERE
ARE W-WE G-GOING...
CREAK-

MY LAND.



WHERE YOU SHOULD'VE BEEN ALL ALONG.

ASSISTANCE INTOL
K_Din
Yemin

PRODUCTION SUPPORT orangetrack

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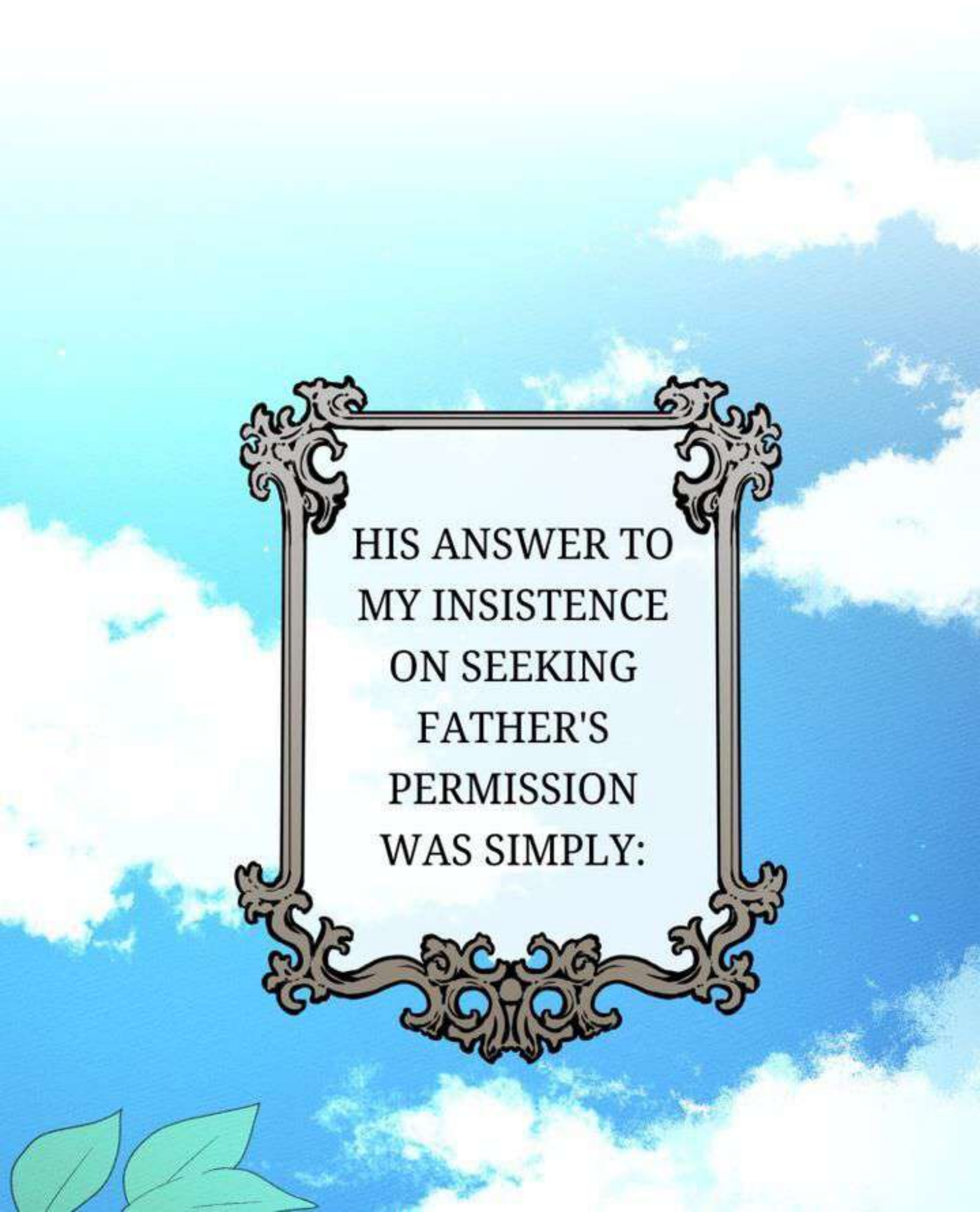
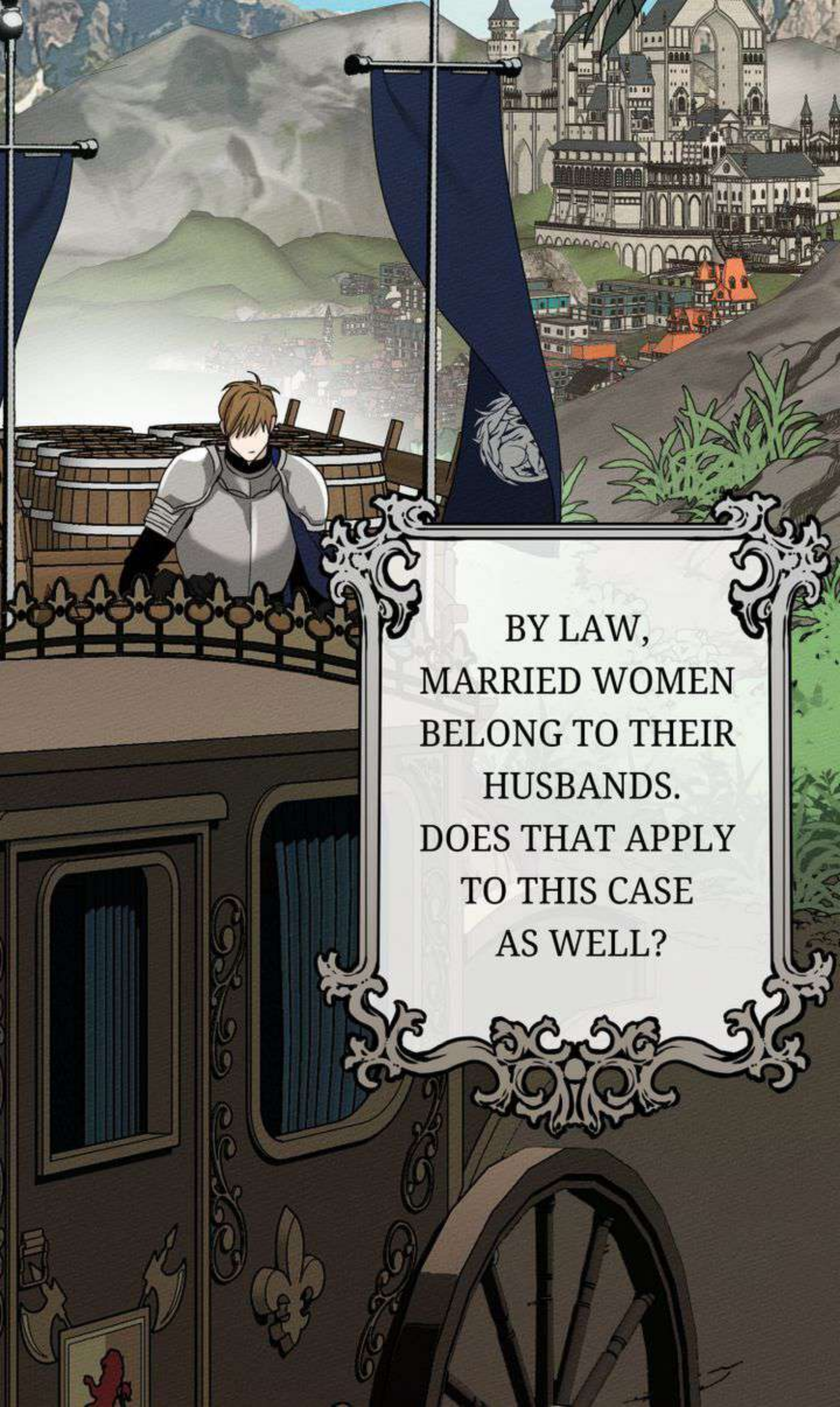
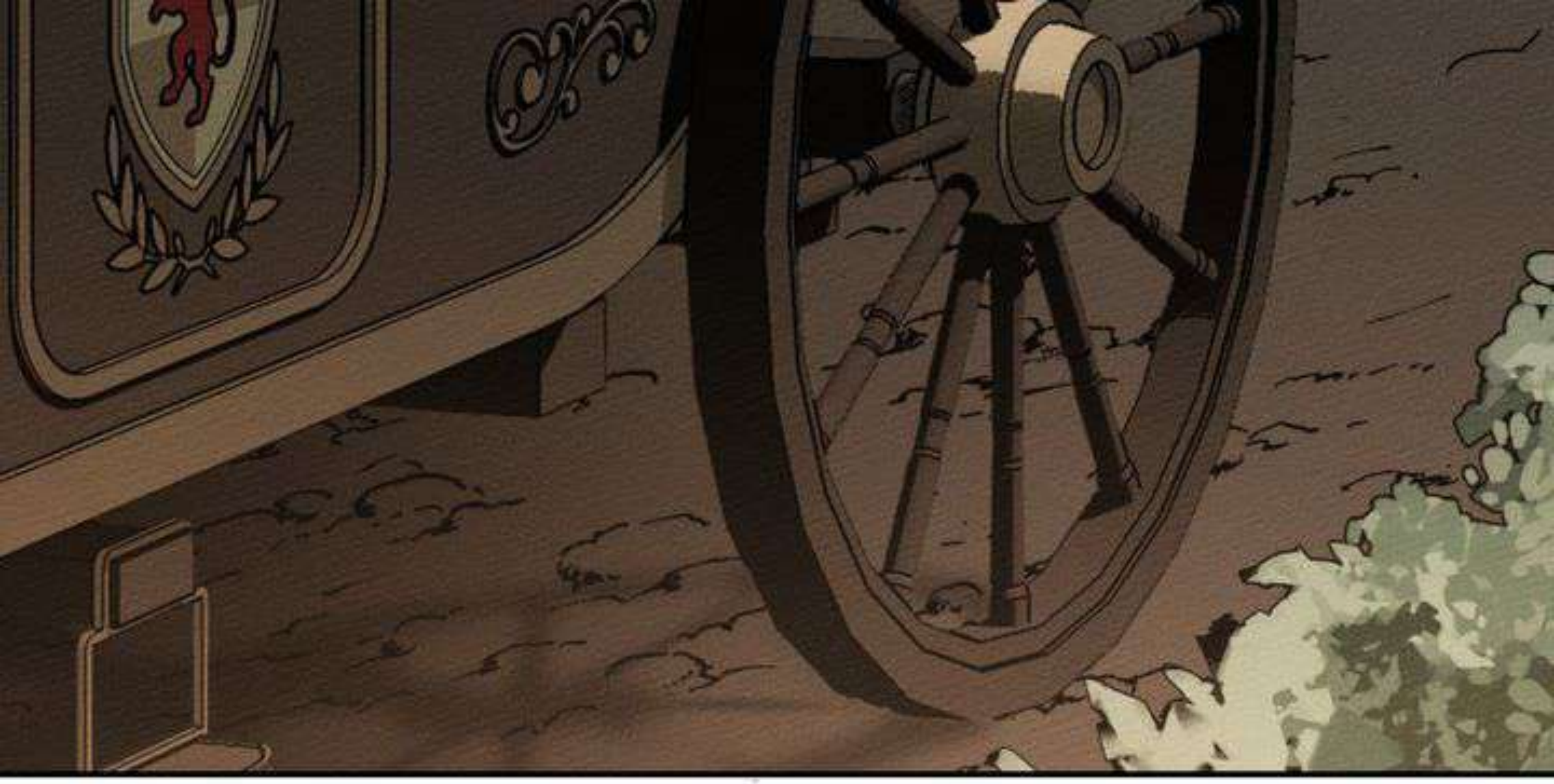

HIS ANSWER TO MY INSISTENCE ON SEEKING FATHER'S PERMISSION WAS SIMPLY:

"YOU ARE MY WIFE."

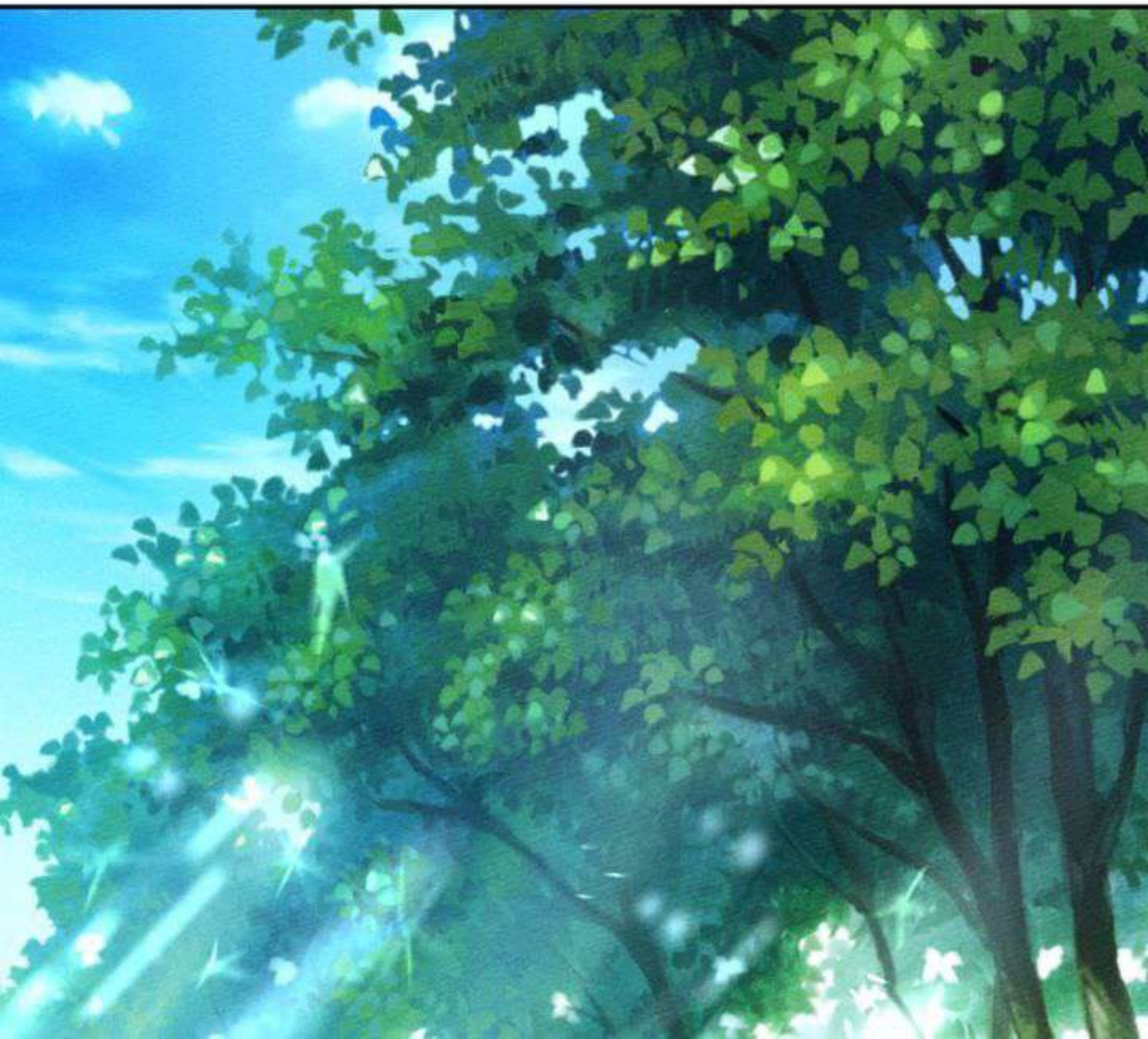

BY LAW, MARRIED WOMEN BELONG TO THEIR HUSBANDS. DOES THAT APPLY TO THIS CASE AS WELL?

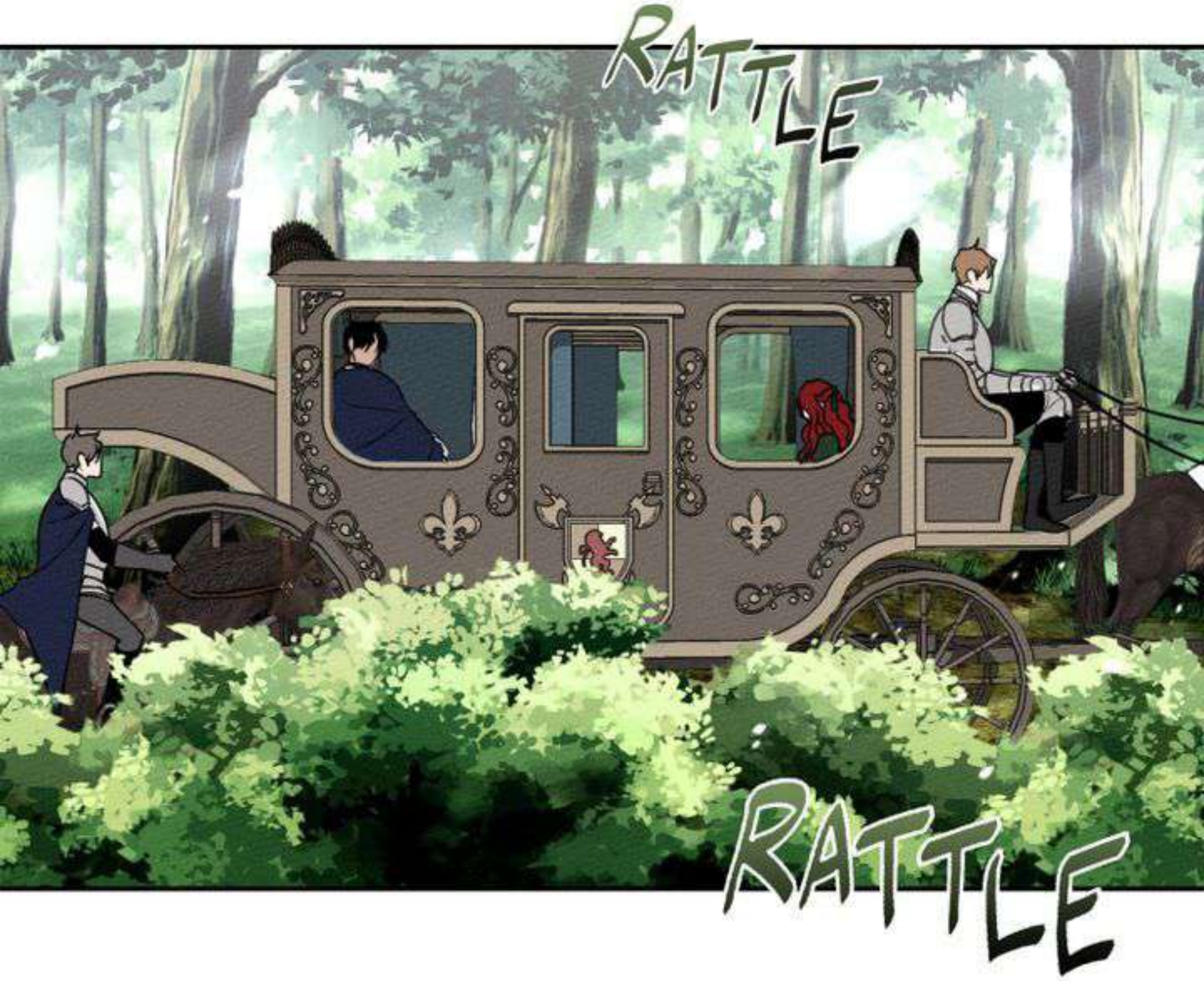


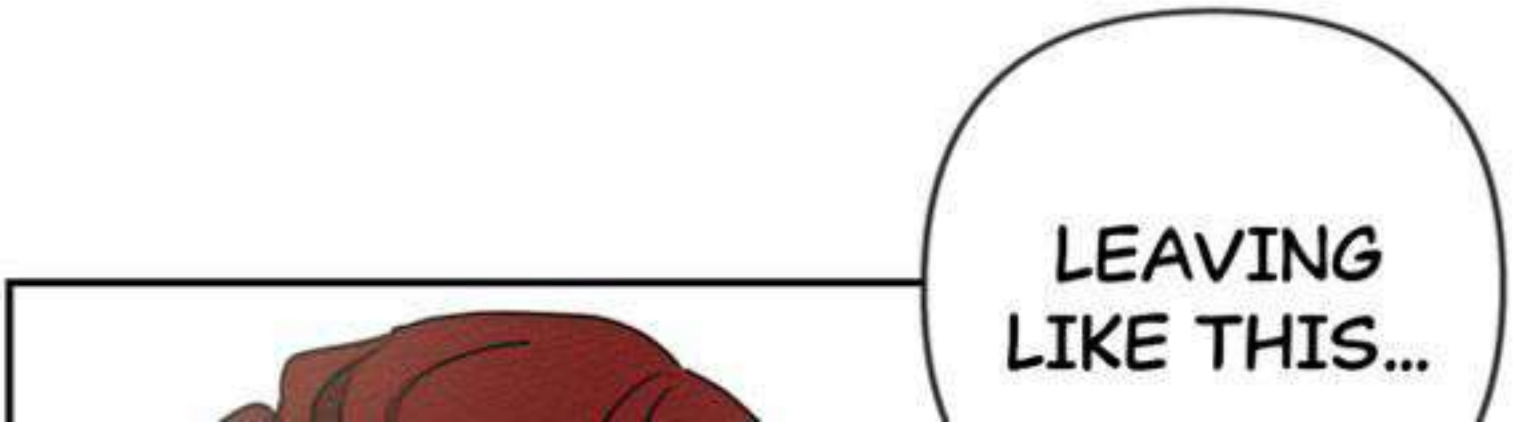
Under the Oak Tree

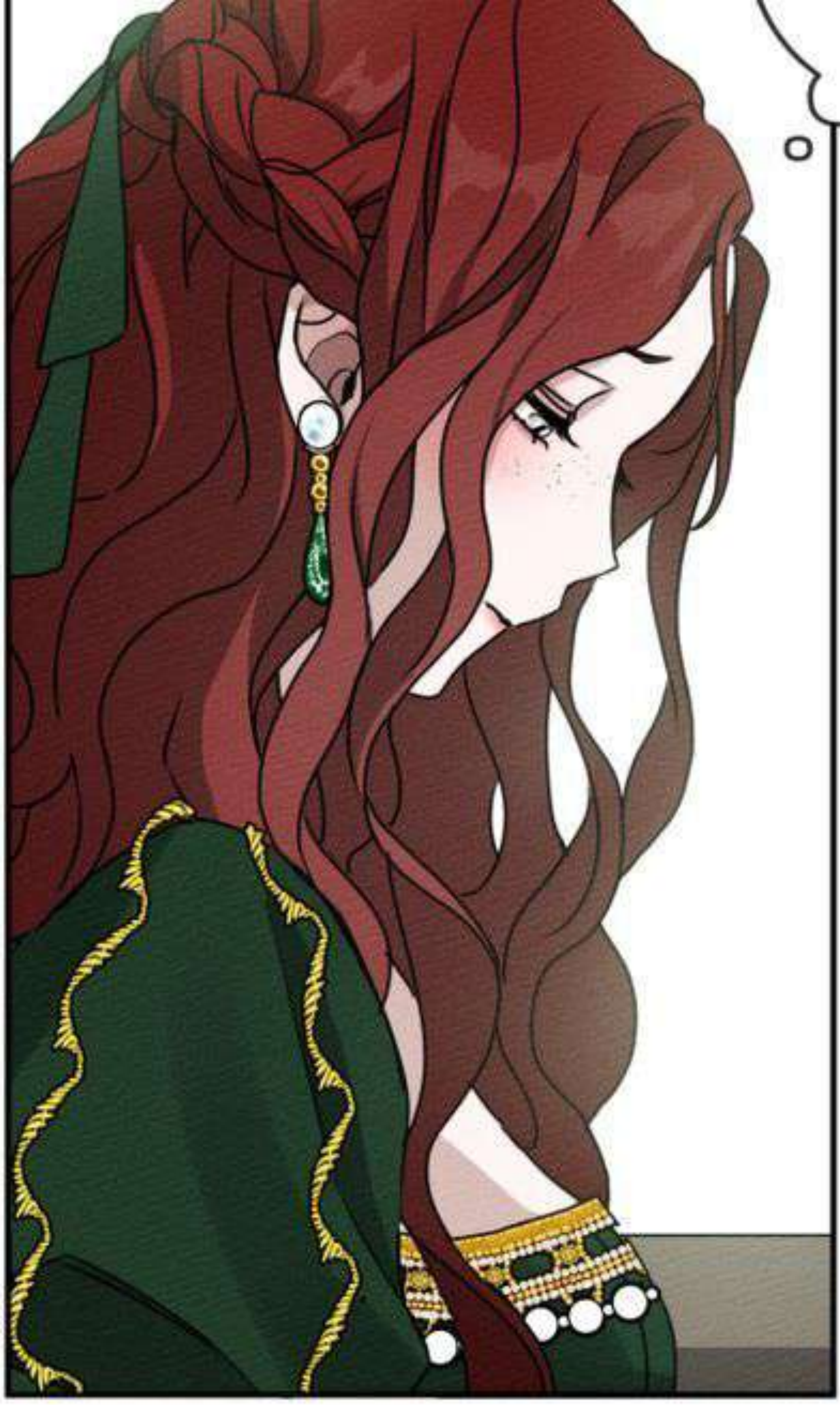
ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

3

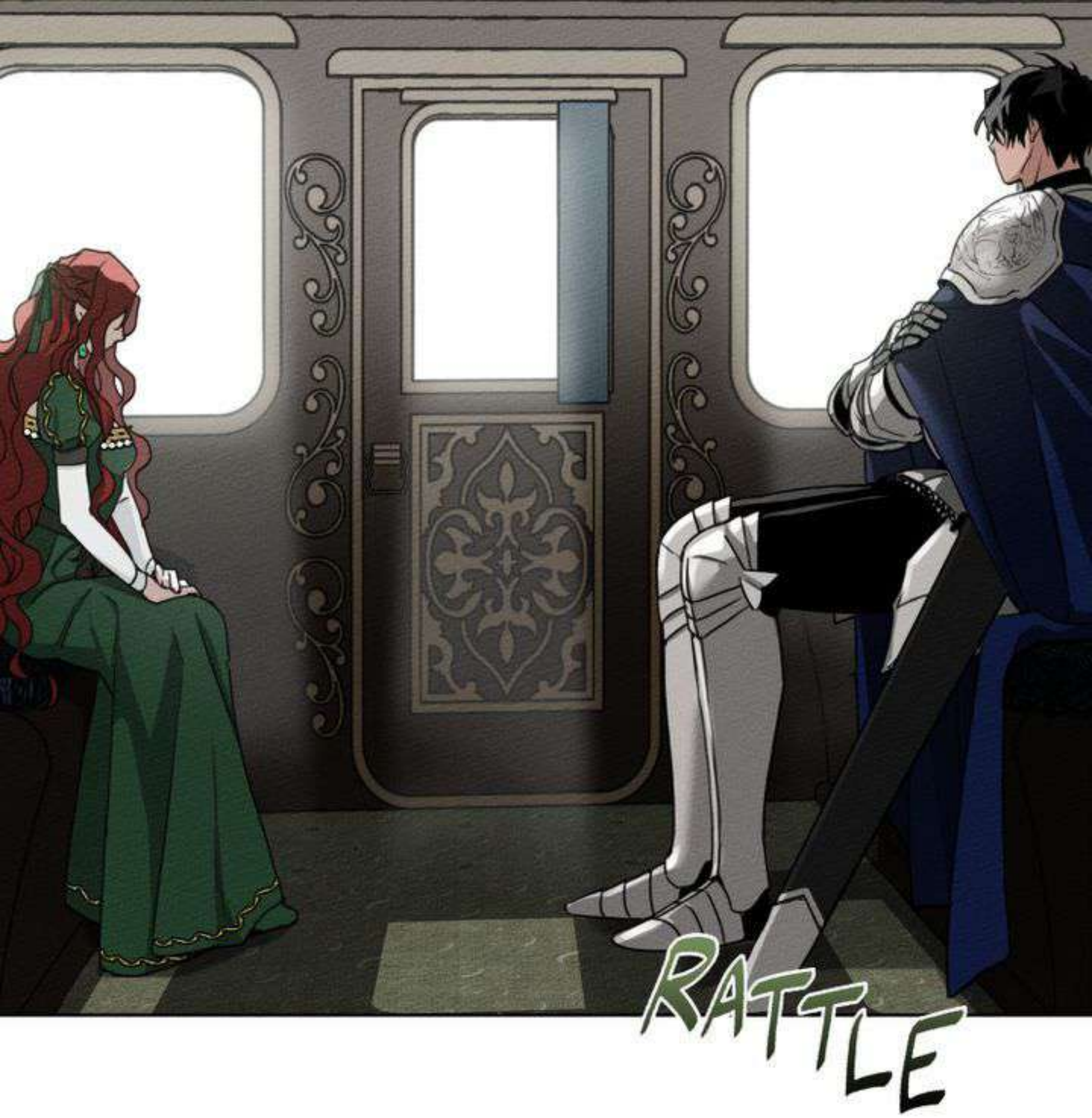



RATTLE
RATTLE

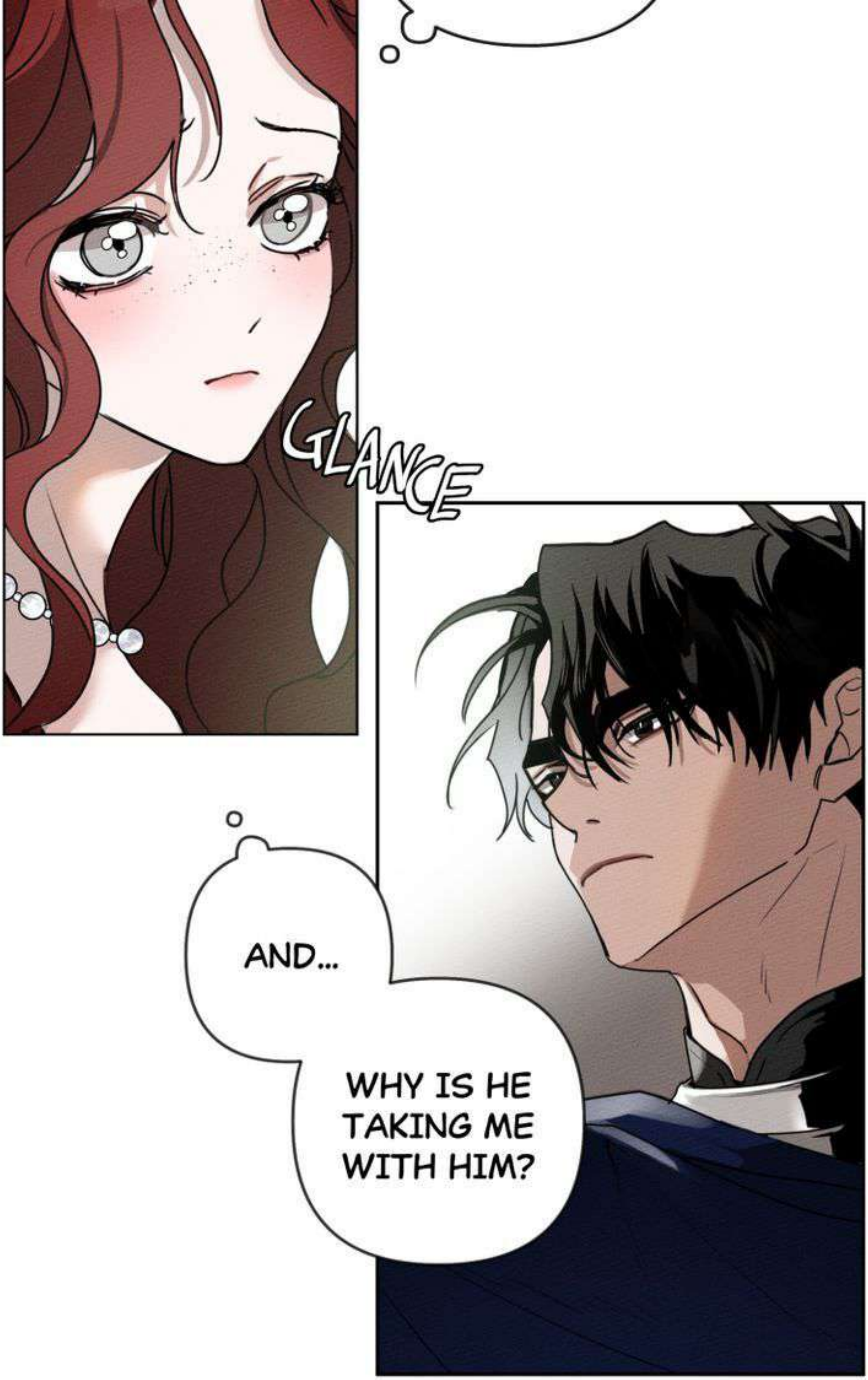

LEAVING LIKE THIS...

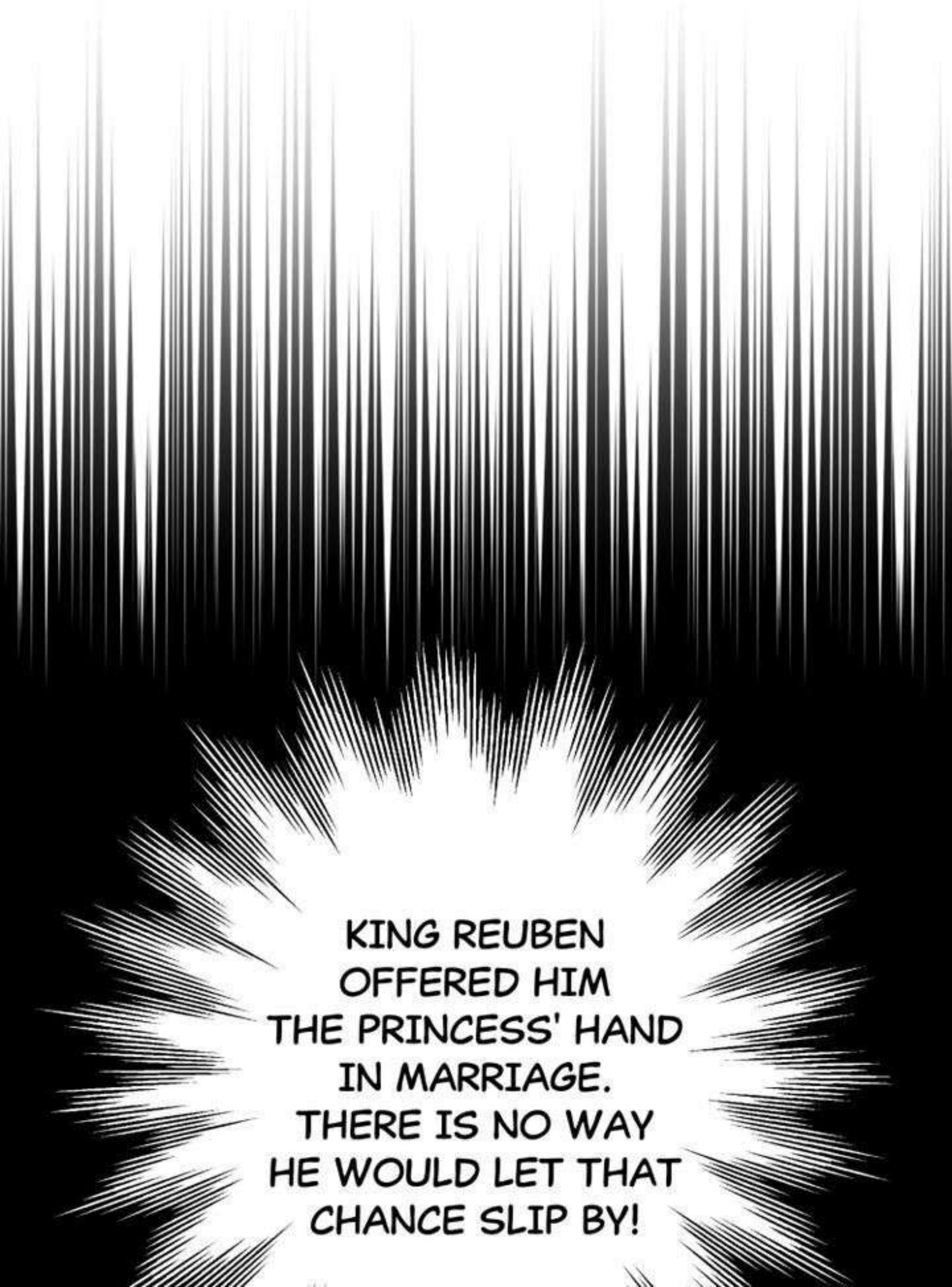


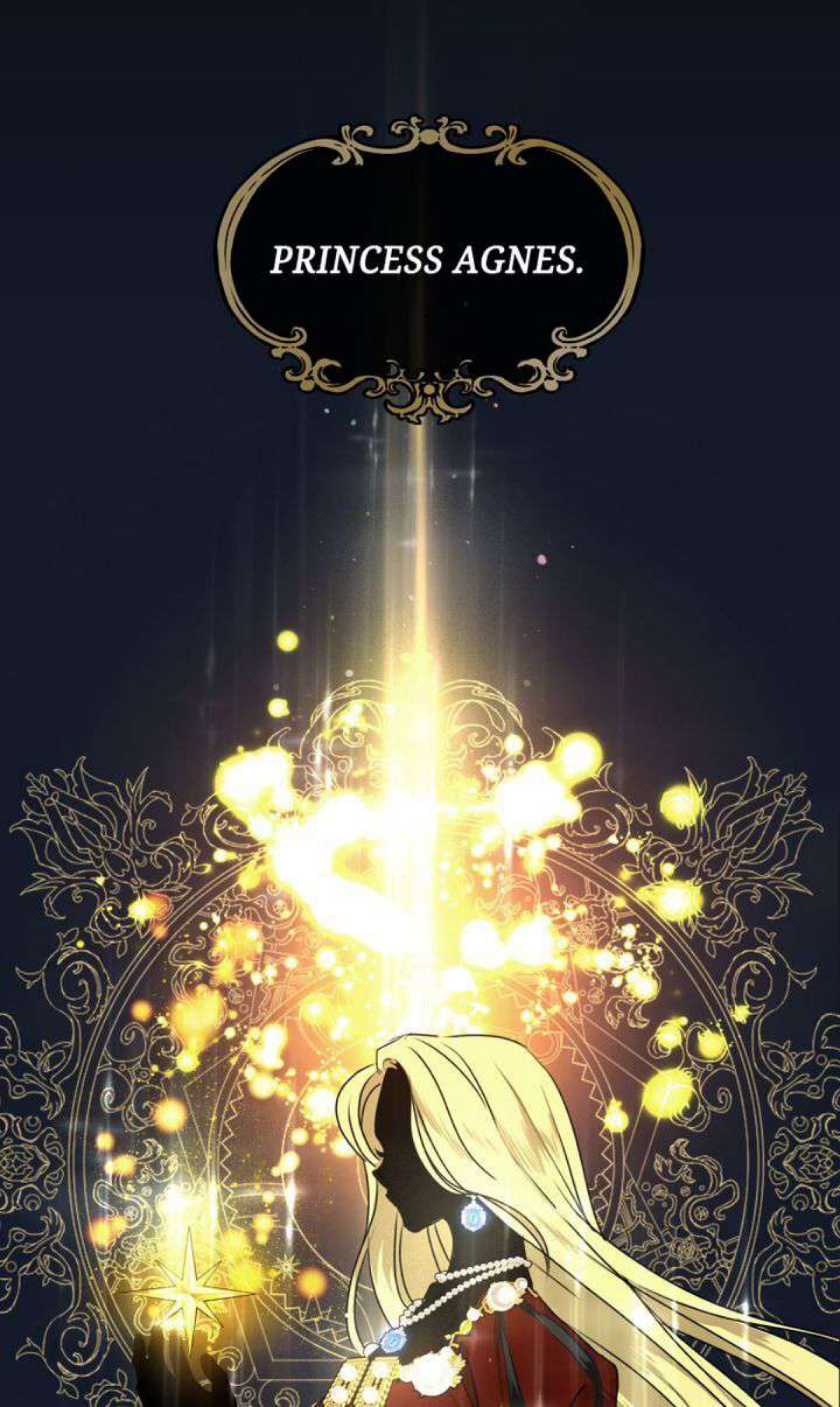
RATTLE

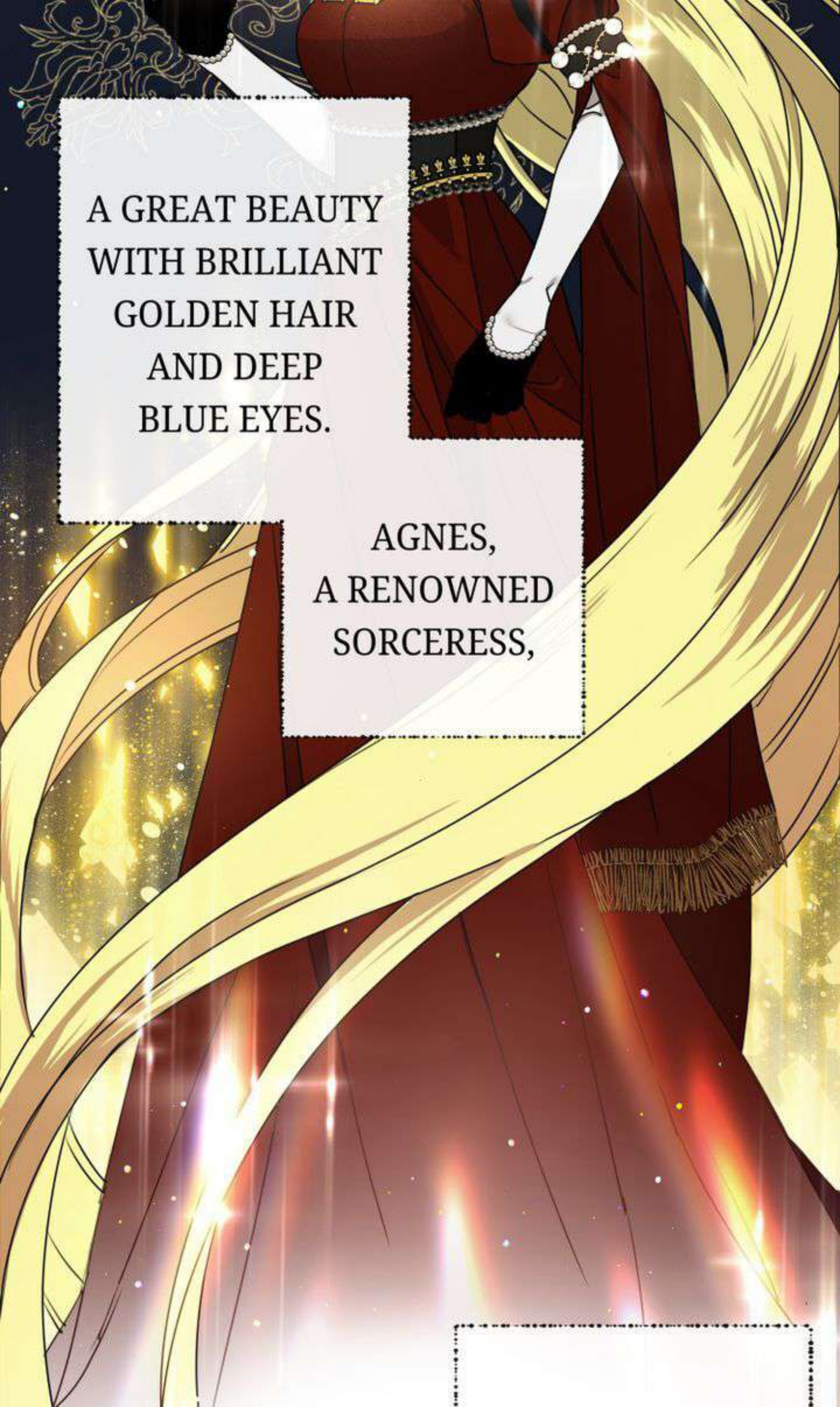

RATTLE

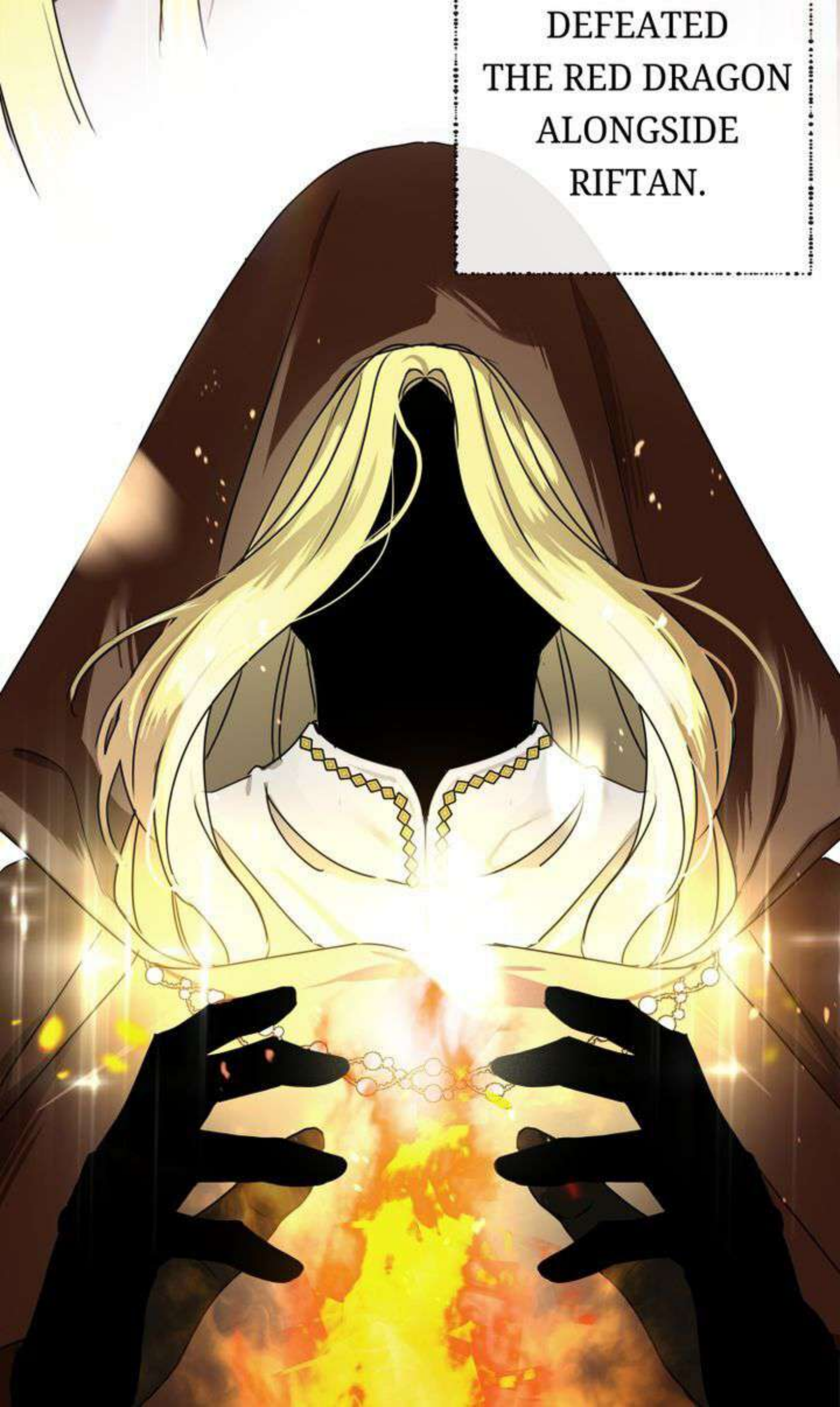
WITHOUT A WORD TO FATHER... WHAT IF HE GETS MAD?


GLANCE
AND...
WHY IS HE TAKING ME WITH HIM?

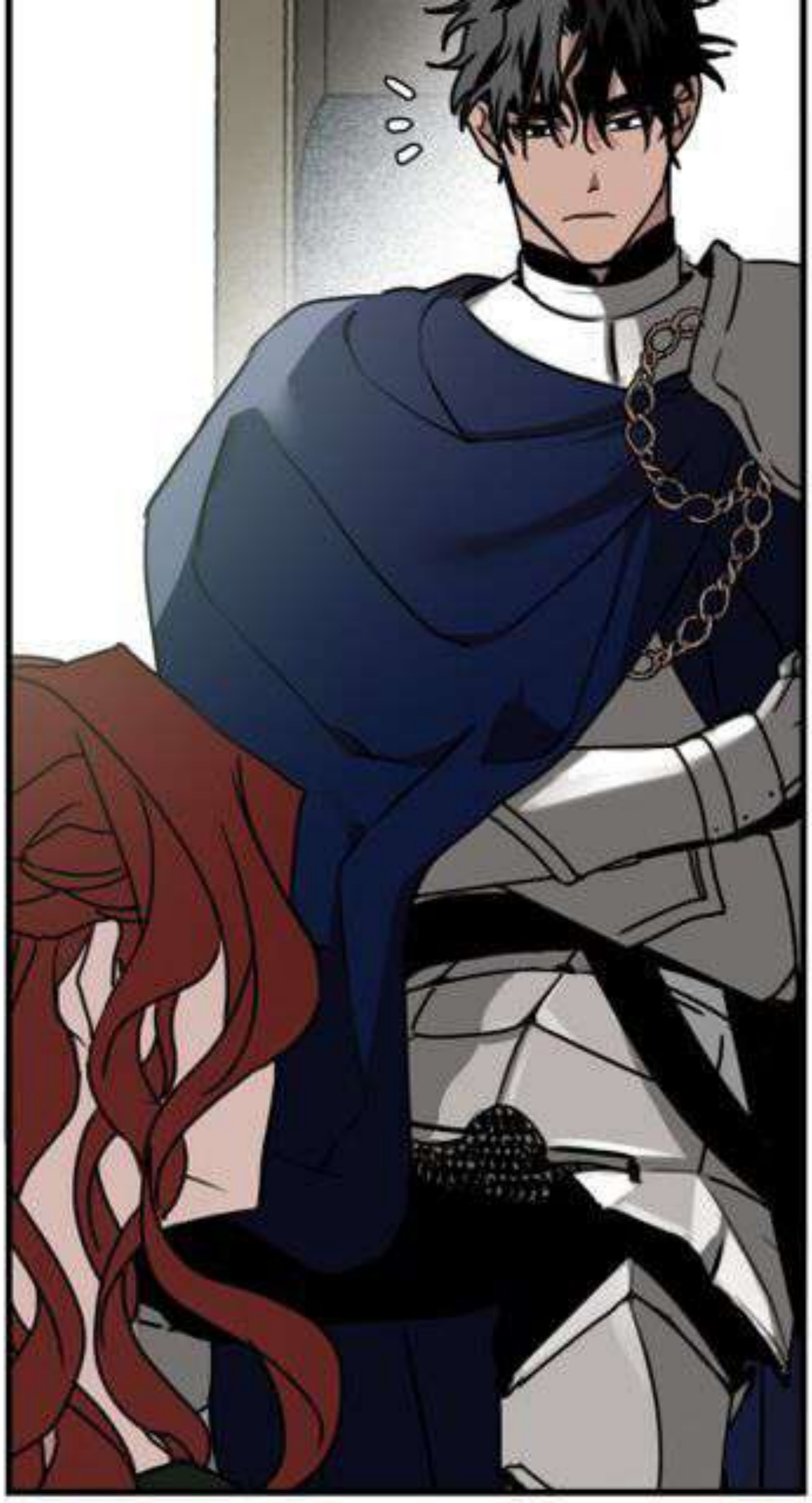

KING REUBEN OFFERED HIM THE PRINCESS' HAND IN MARRIAGE. THERE IS NO WAY HE WOULD LET THAT CHANCE SLIP BY!

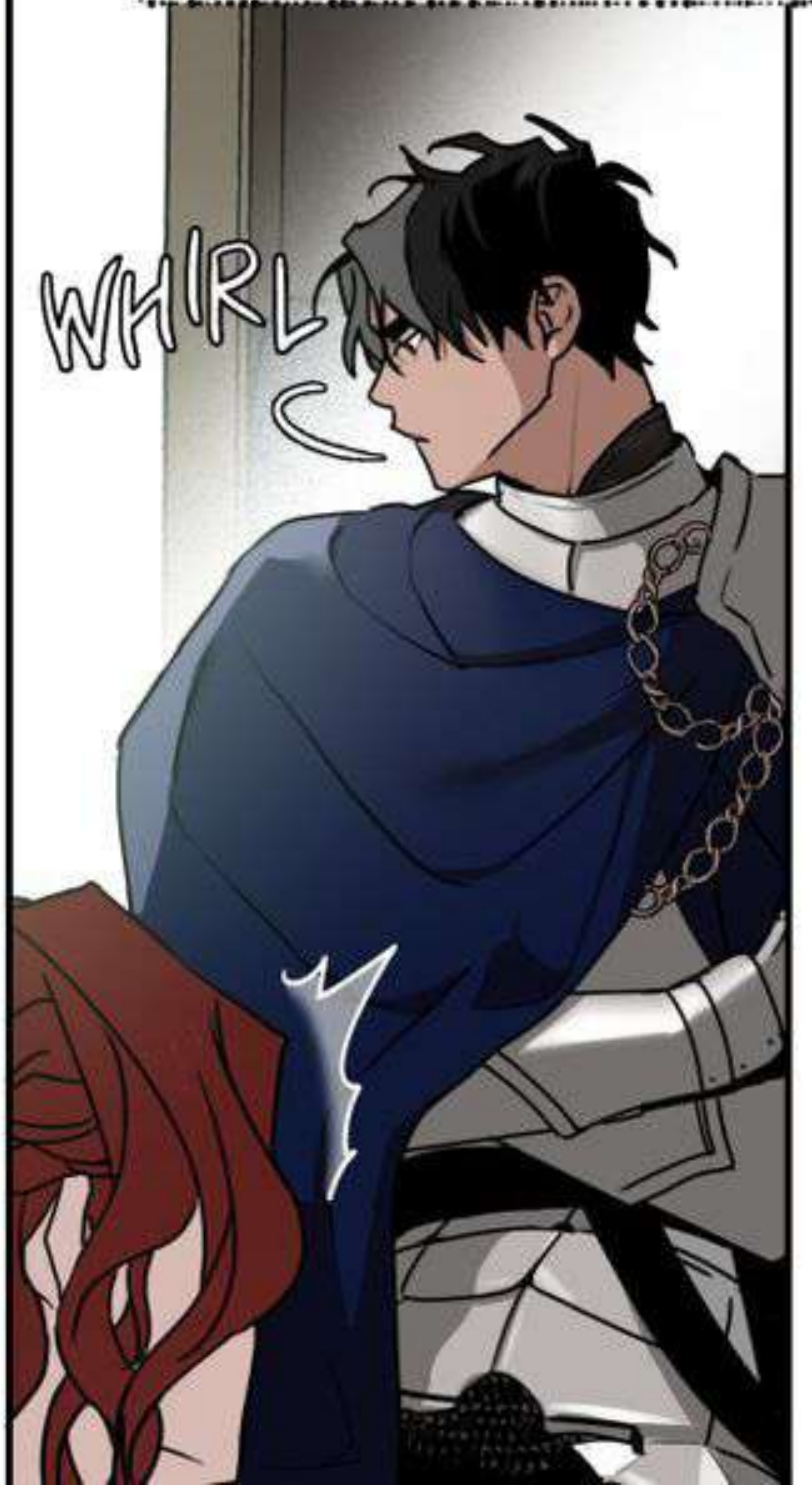

PRINCESS AGNES.


A GREAT BEAUTY WITH BRILLIANT GOLDEN HAIR AND DEEP BLUE EYES.
AGNES, A RENOWNED SORCERESS,


DEFEATED
THE RED DRAGON
ALONGSIDE
RIFTAN.

A WEDDING
WITH
A PRINCESS
LIKE THAT...




IF THE CHURCH GRANTS THE DIVORCE...
WHIRL

NO FOOL
IN THE WORLD
WOULD
EVER REFUSE
SUCH A GOLDEN
OPPORTUNITY.

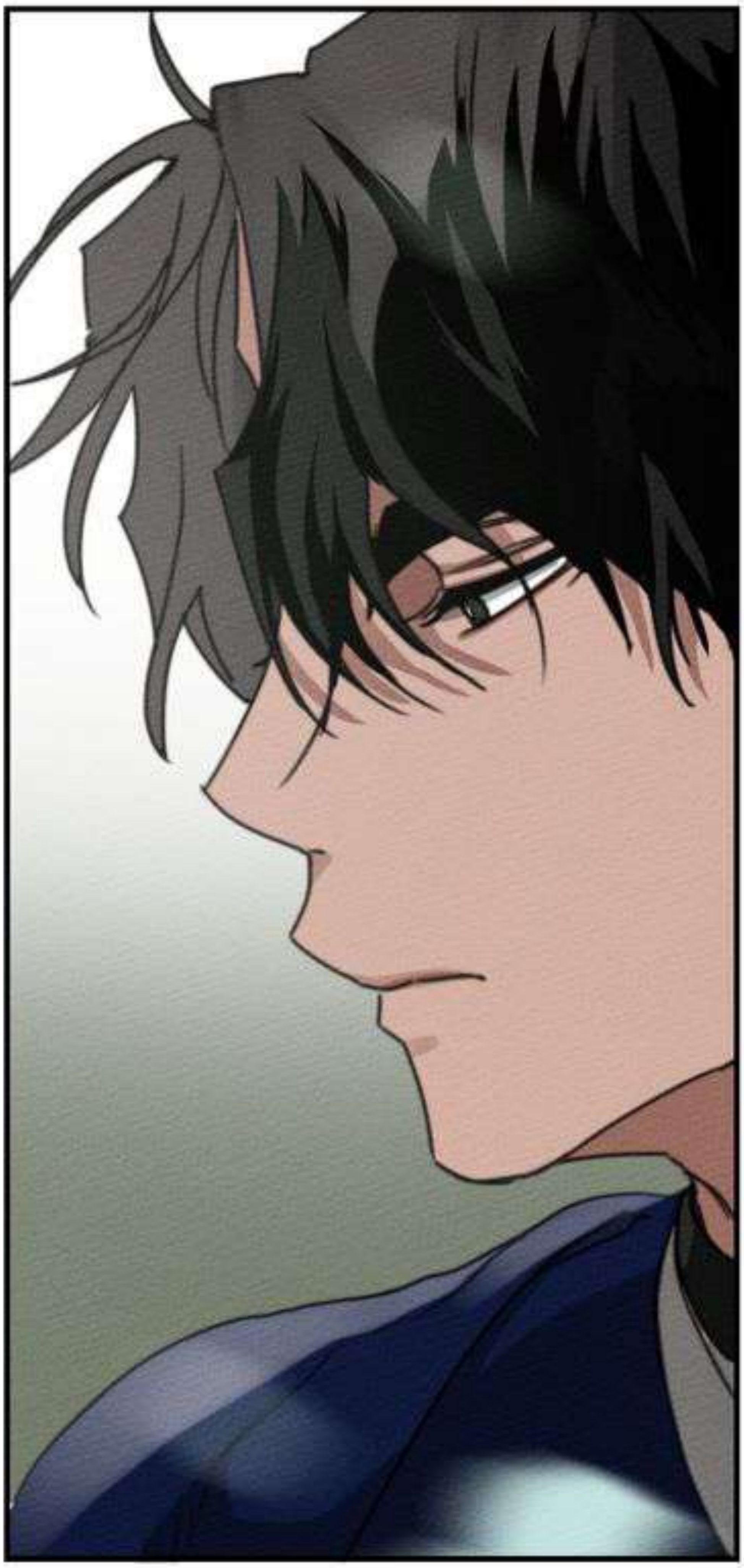
BESIDES,
I ONLY SPENT
A SINGLE NIGHT
WITH HIM.

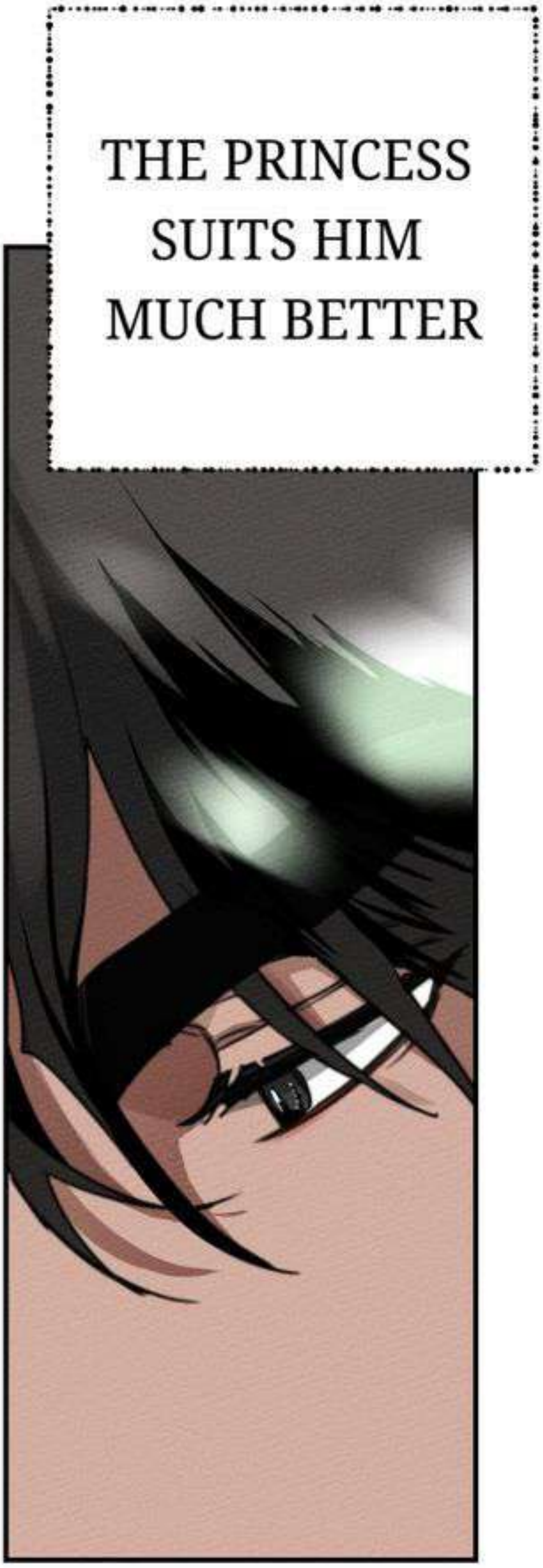
HE'D
HAVE TO BE
A FOOL...

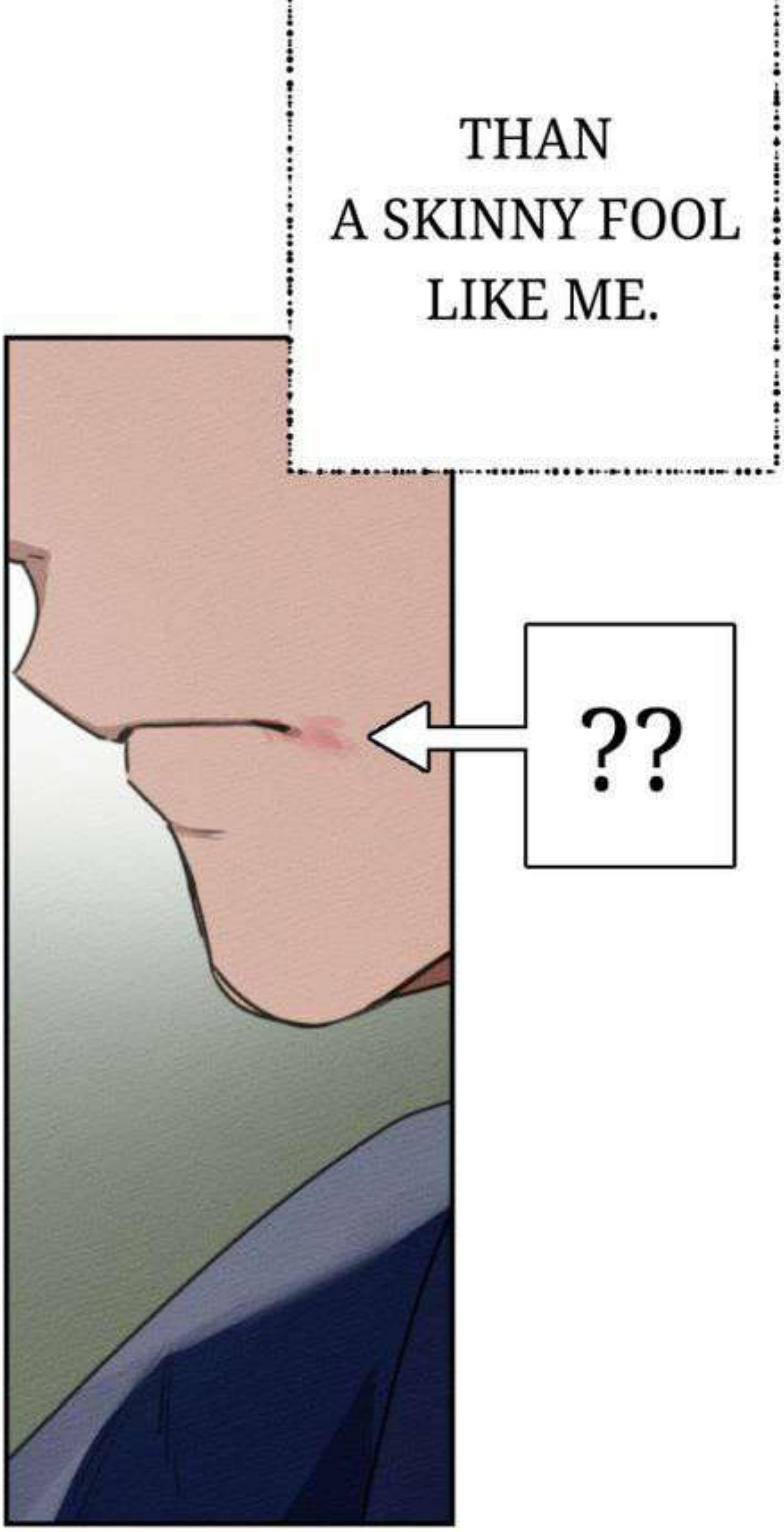
RIGHT. HE NEVER WANTED THIS MARRIAGE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

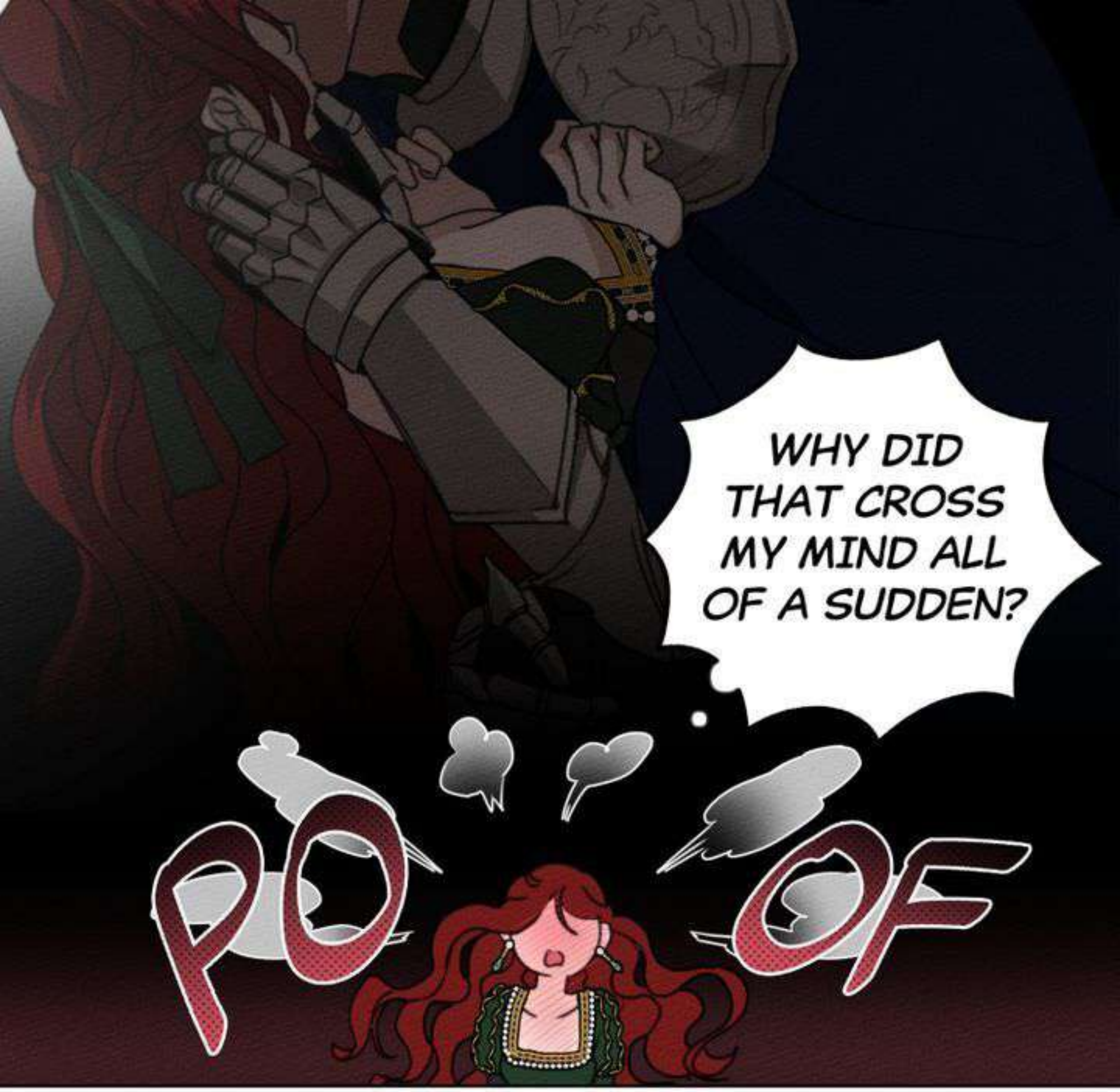
IT'S AMAZING HE EVEN REMEMBERS ME.

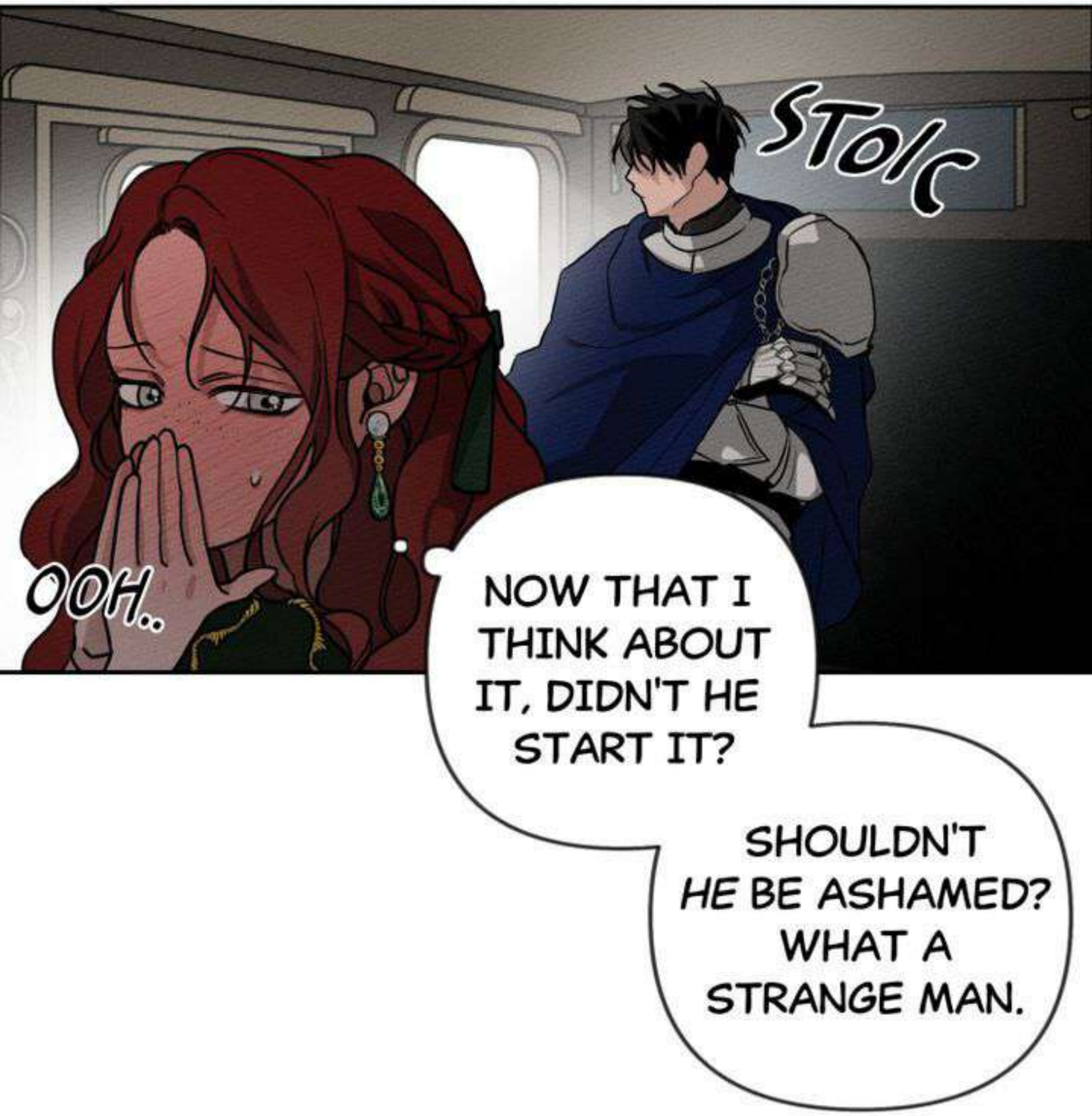
HE'S ONLY TIED TO ME OUT OF RESPONSIBILITY.

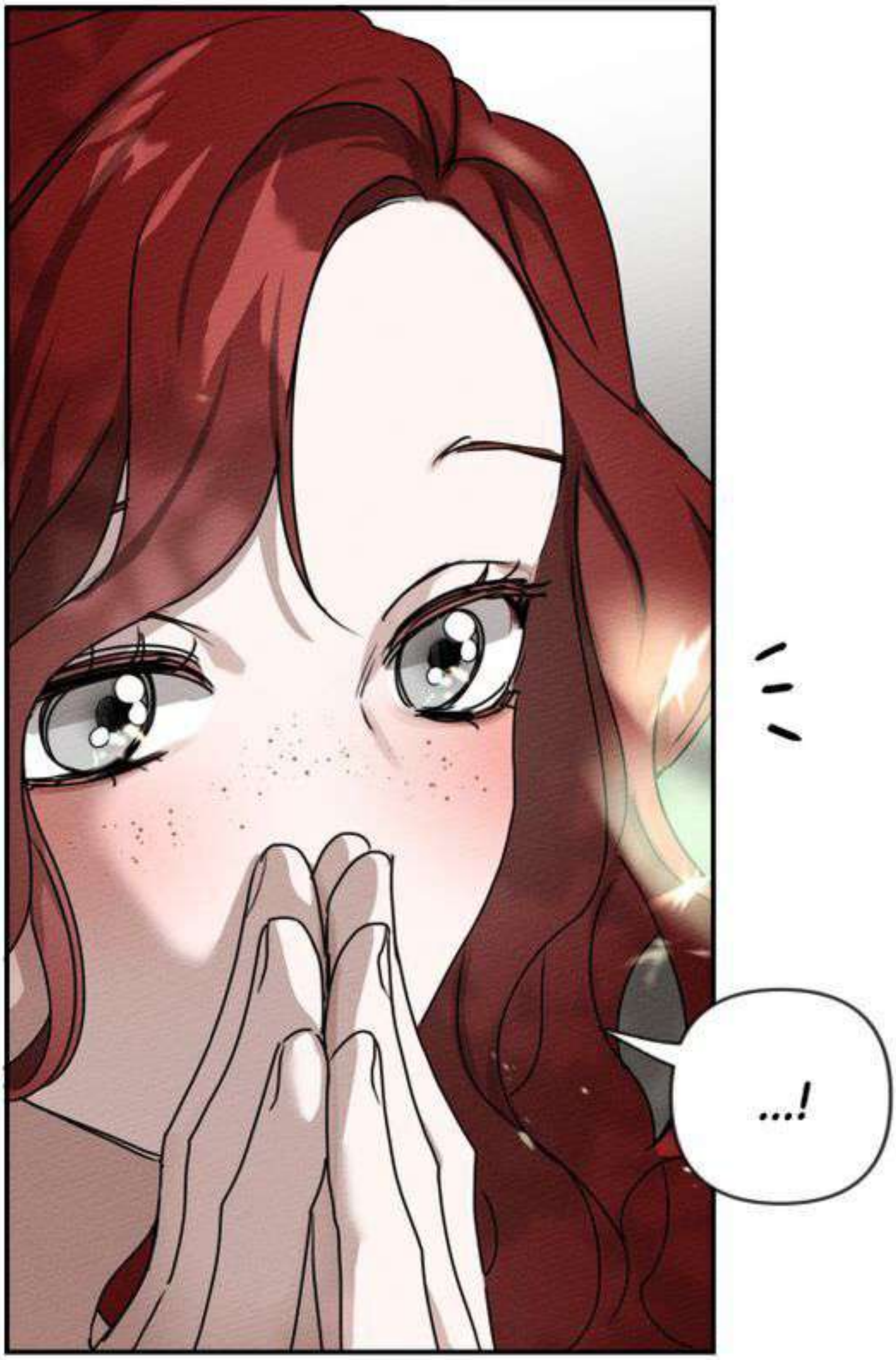


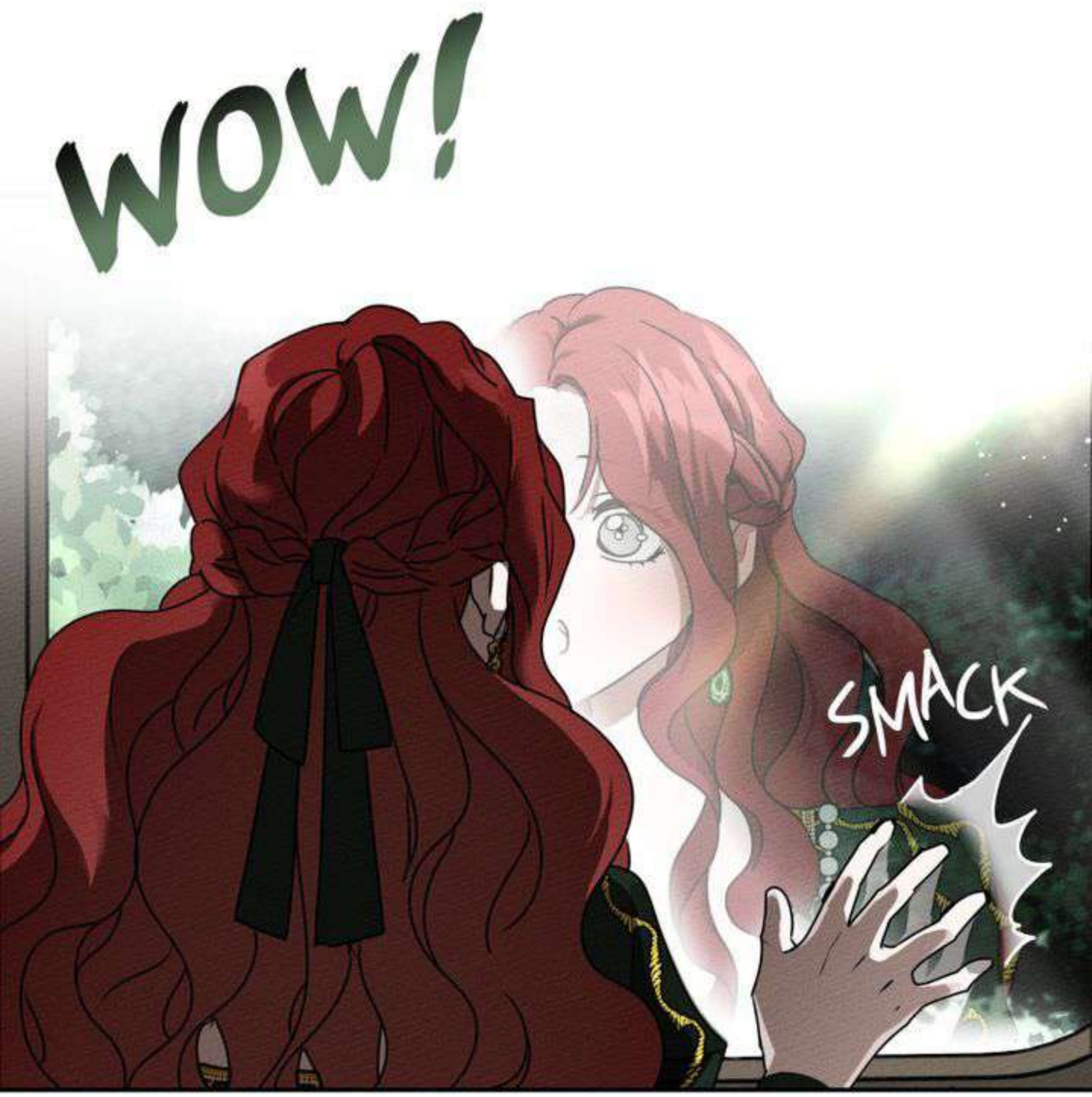

THE PRINCESS SUITS HIM MUCH BETTER


THAN A SKINNY FOOL LIKE ME.
??

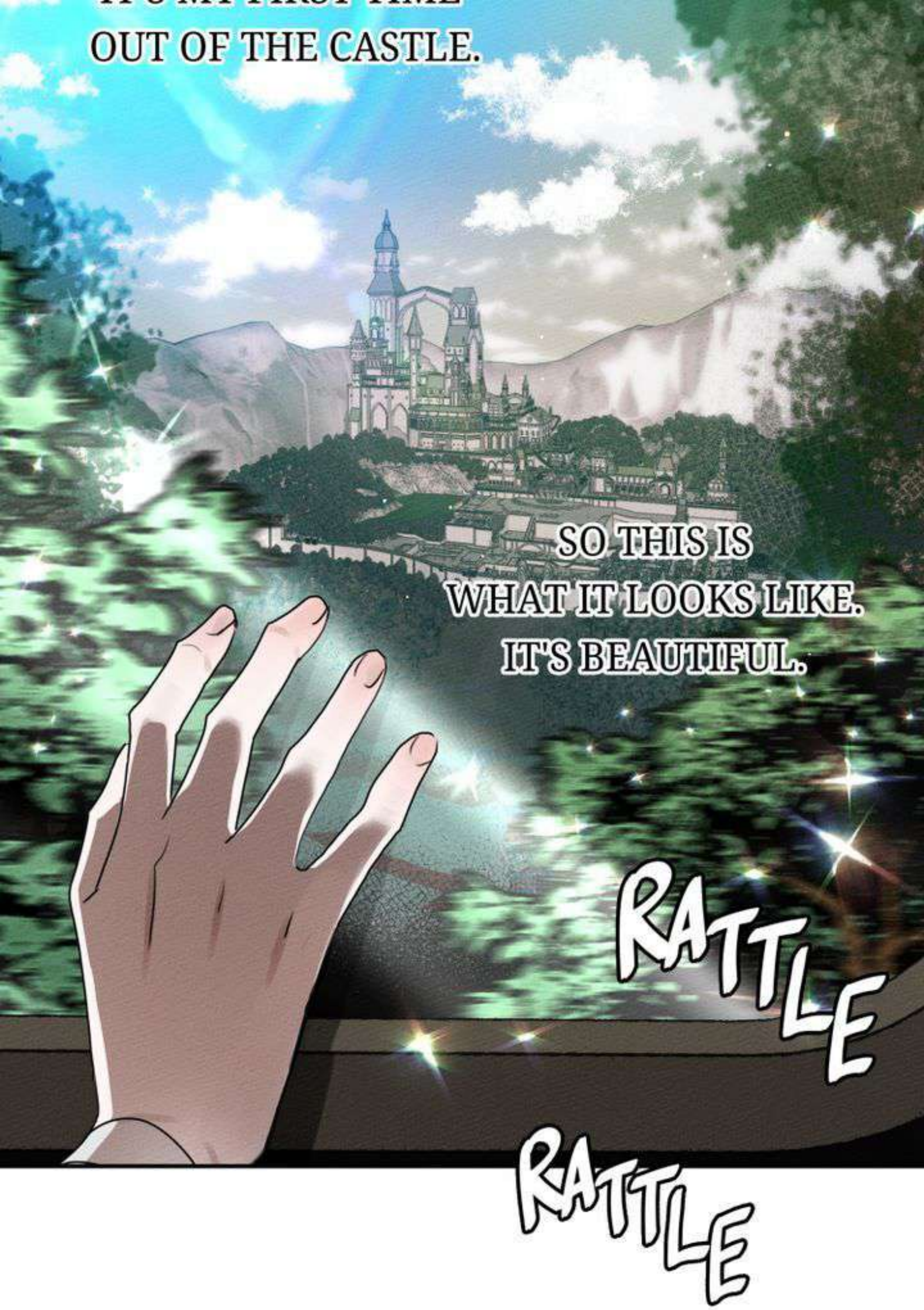

WHY DID THAT CROSS MY MIND ALL OF A SUDDEN?
POOF

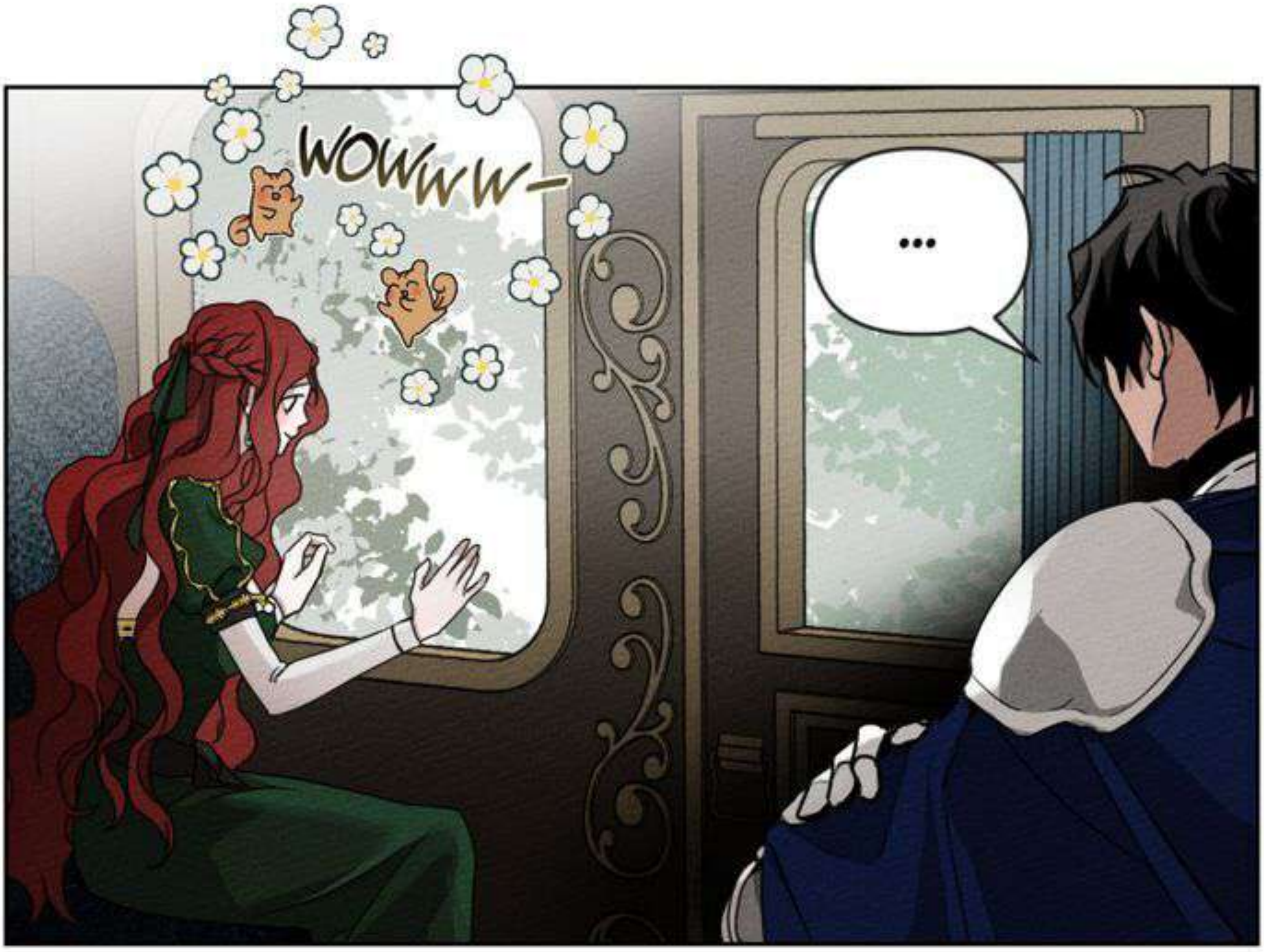

STOIC
OOH..
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, DIDN'T HE START IT?
SHOULDN'T *HE* BE ASHAMED? WHAT A STRANGE MAN.

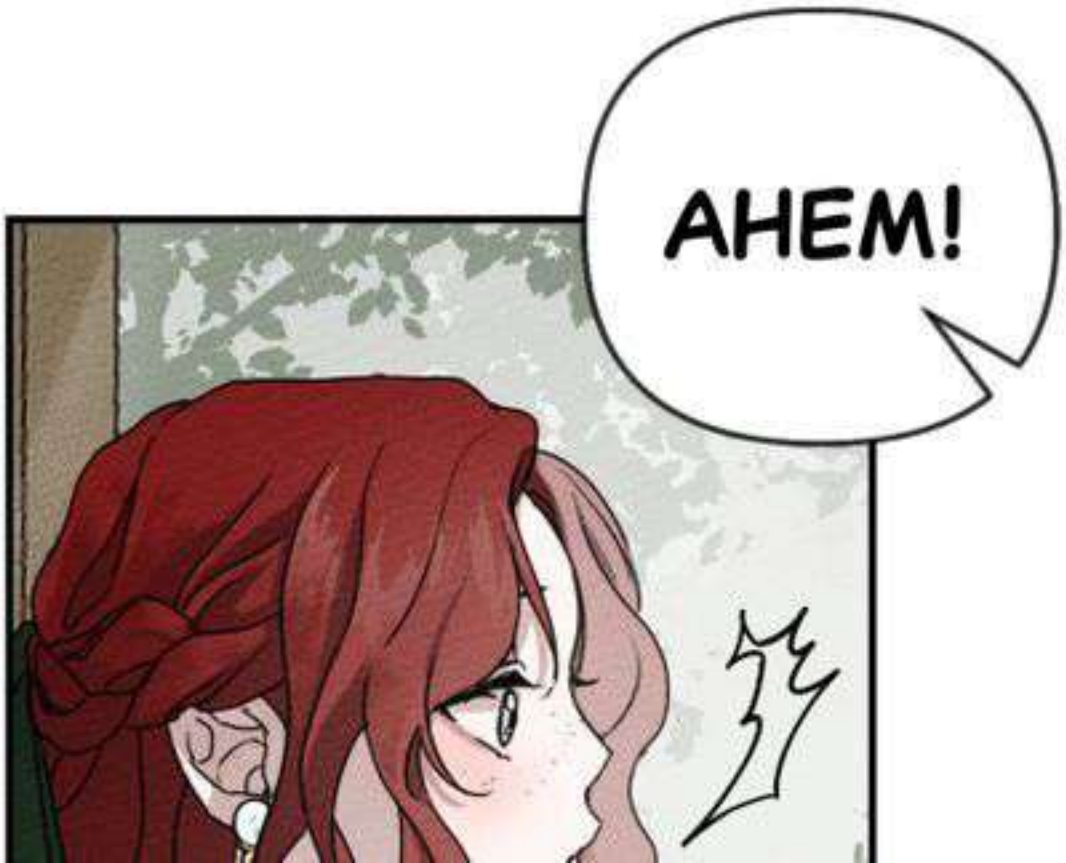



WOW!
SMACK

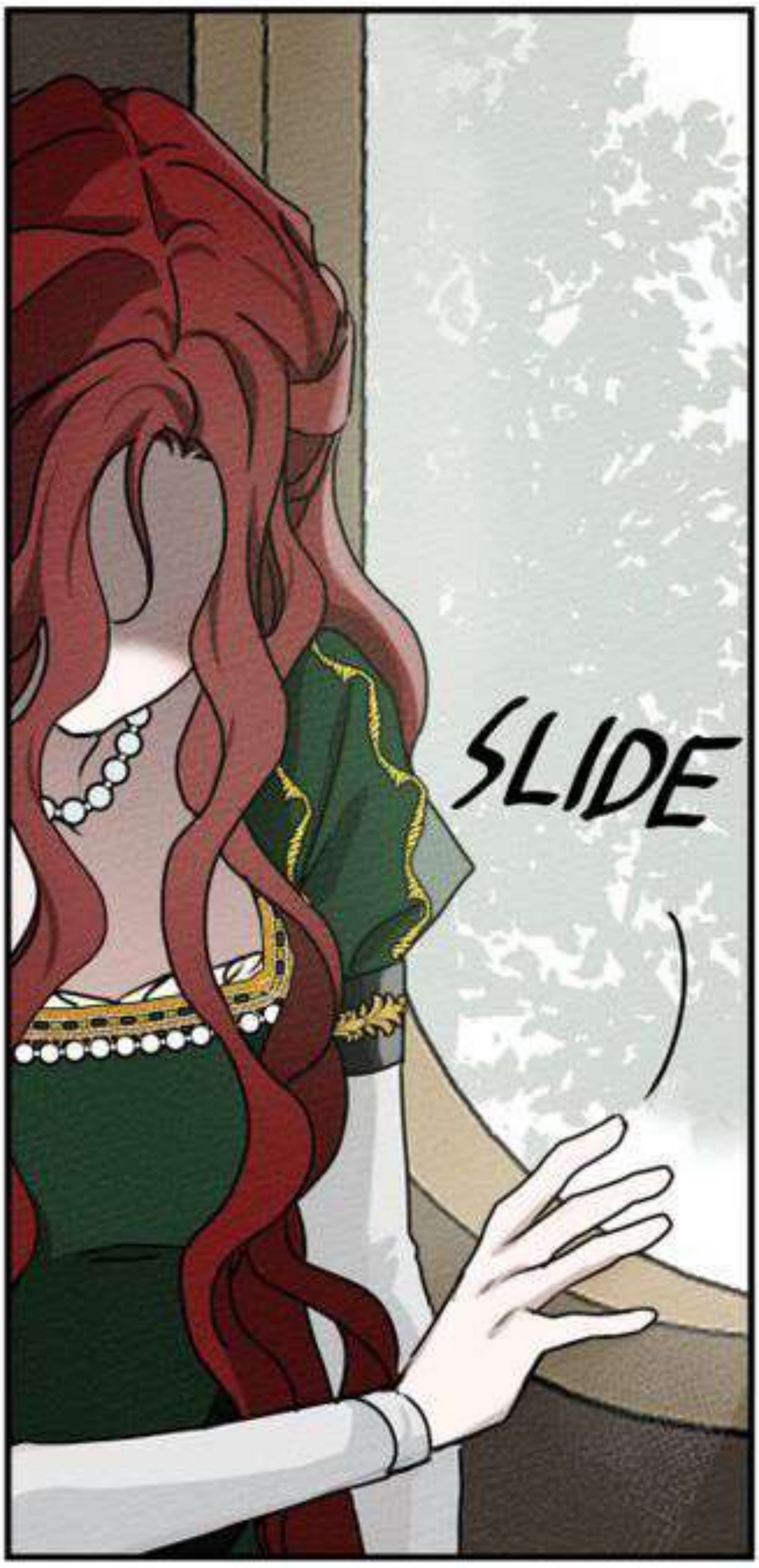
IT'S MY FIRST TIME

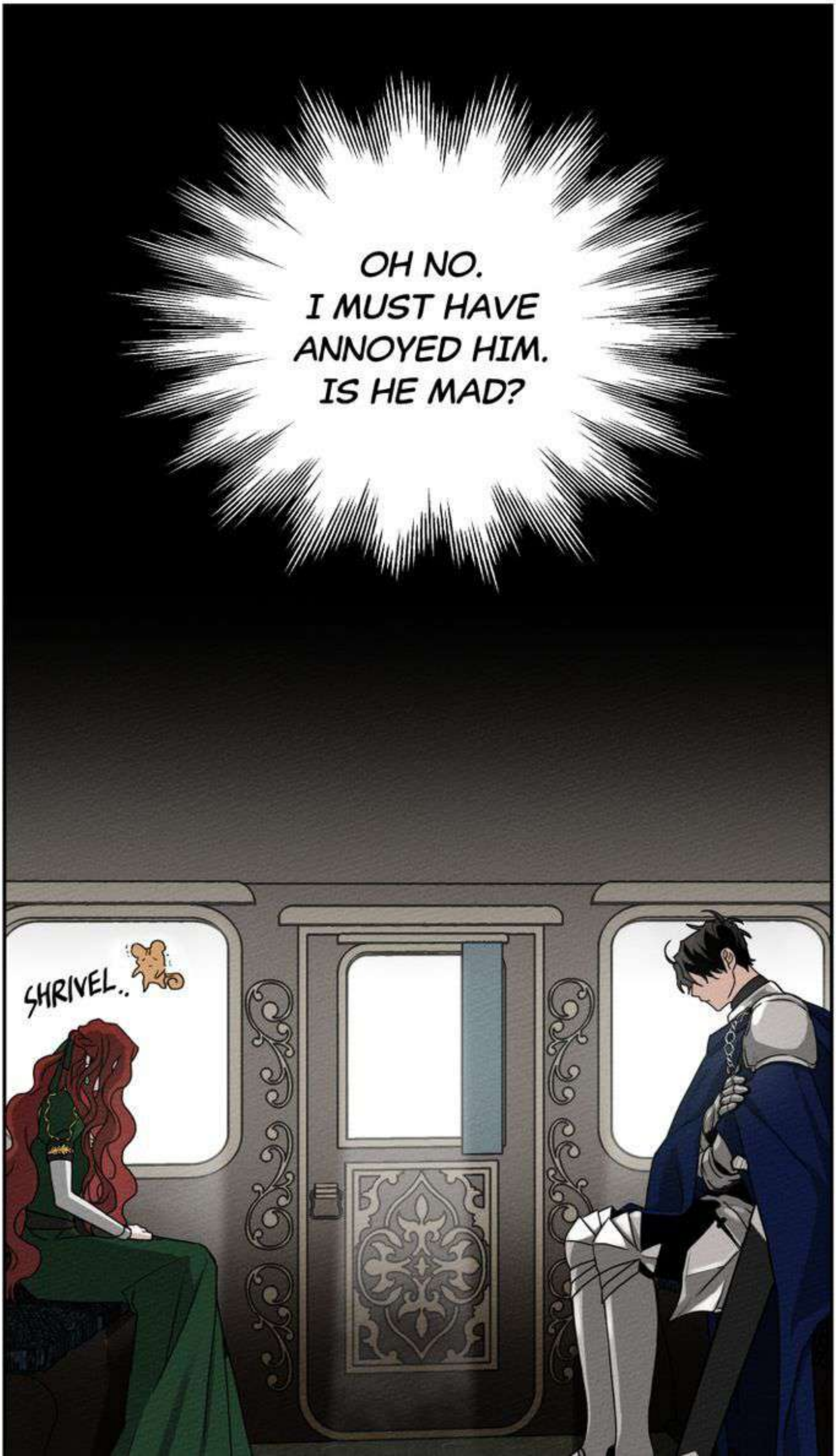

IT'S MY FIRST TIME
OUT OF THE CASTLE.
SO THIS IS
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE.
IT'S BEAUTIFUL.
RATTLE
RATTLE

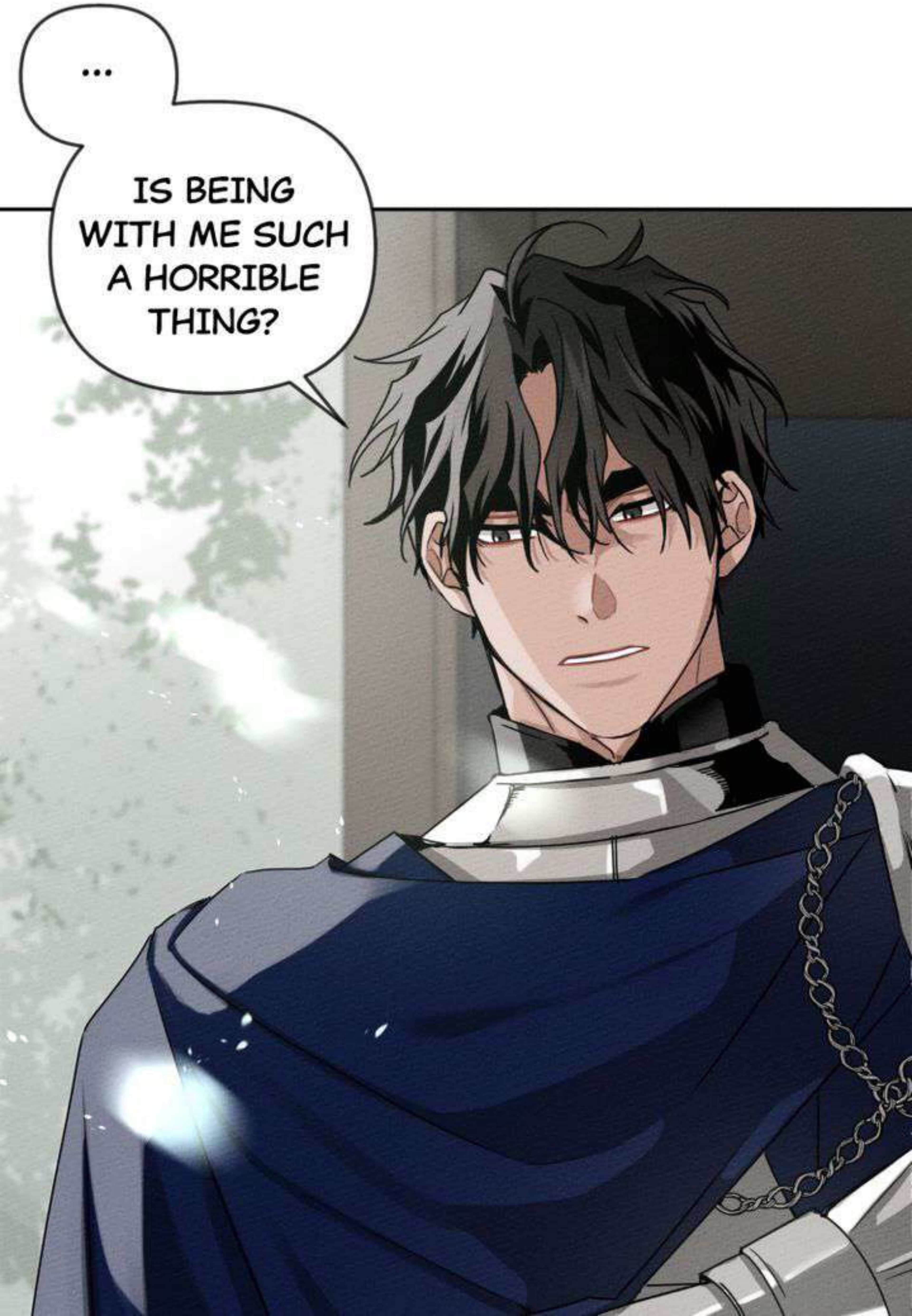

WOWWW—
...

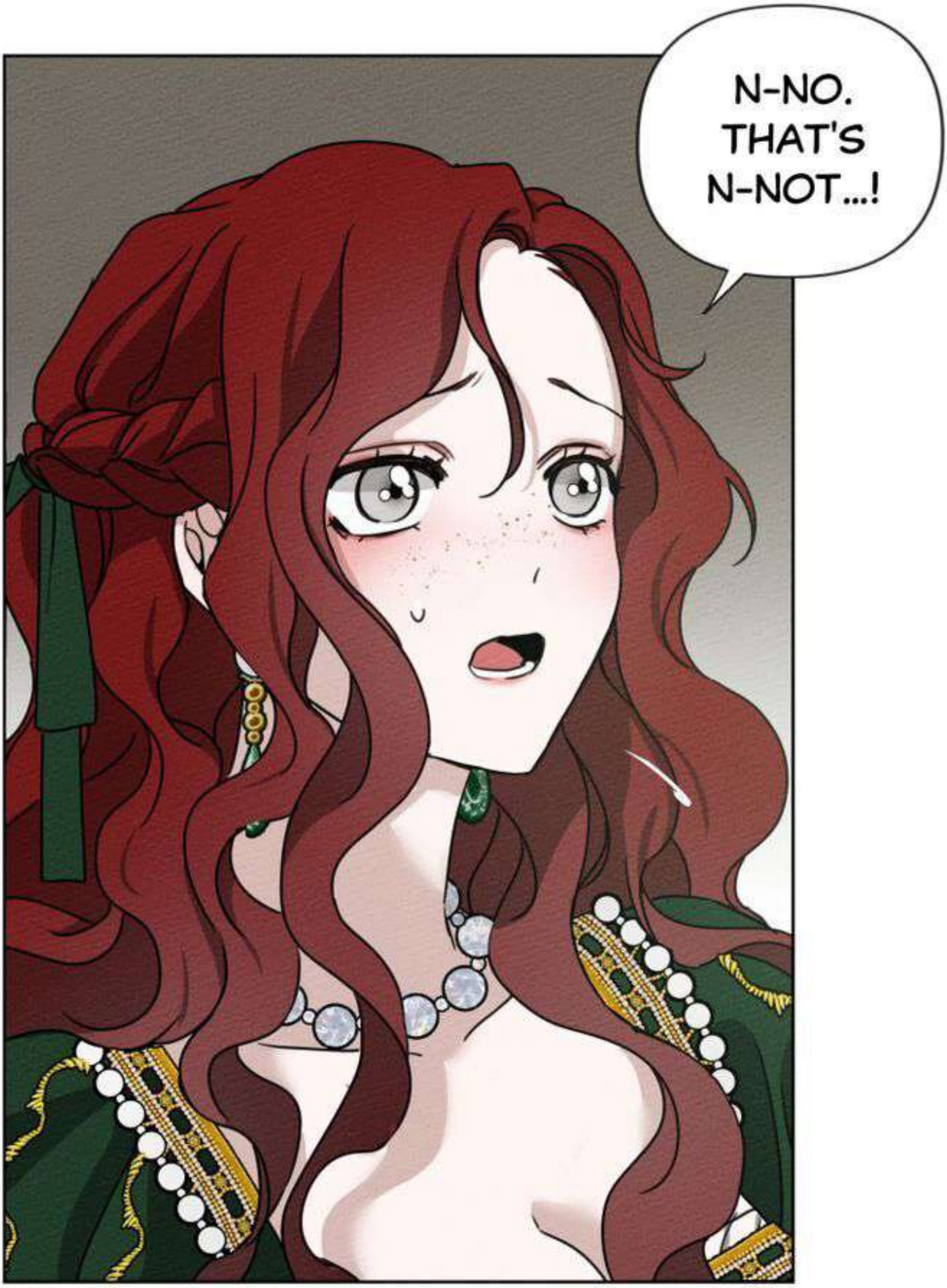

AHEM!

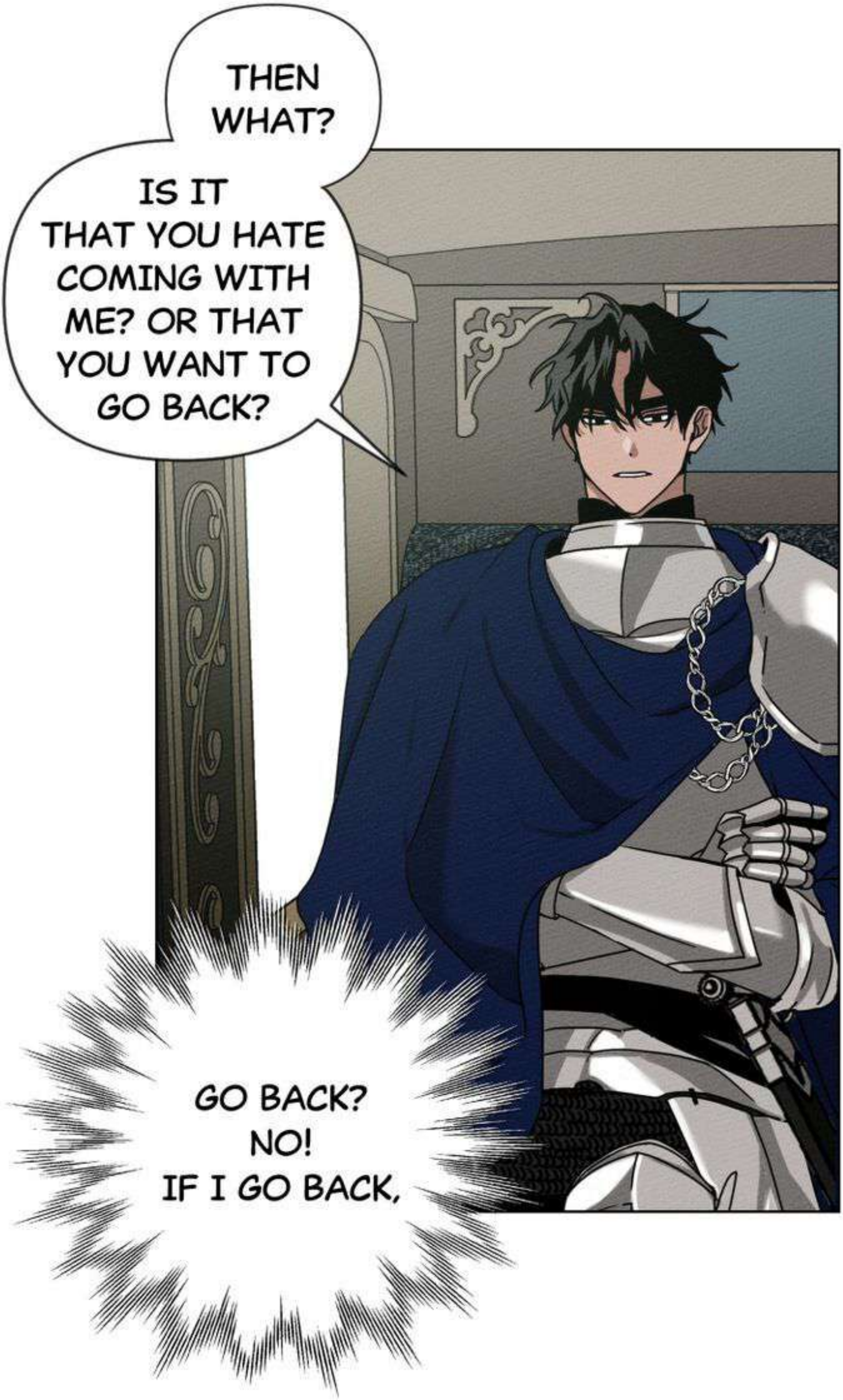
HA-

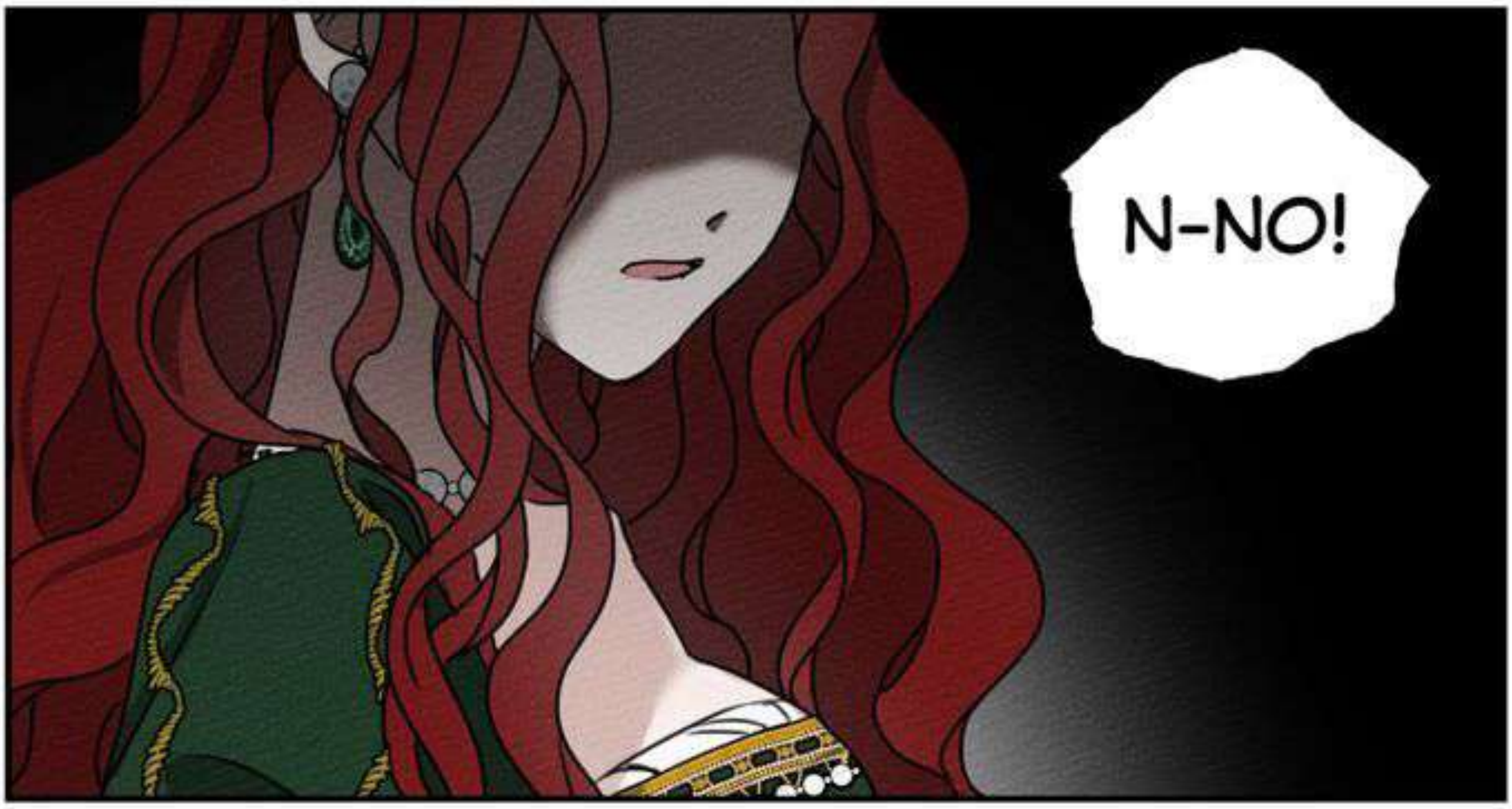

SLIDE

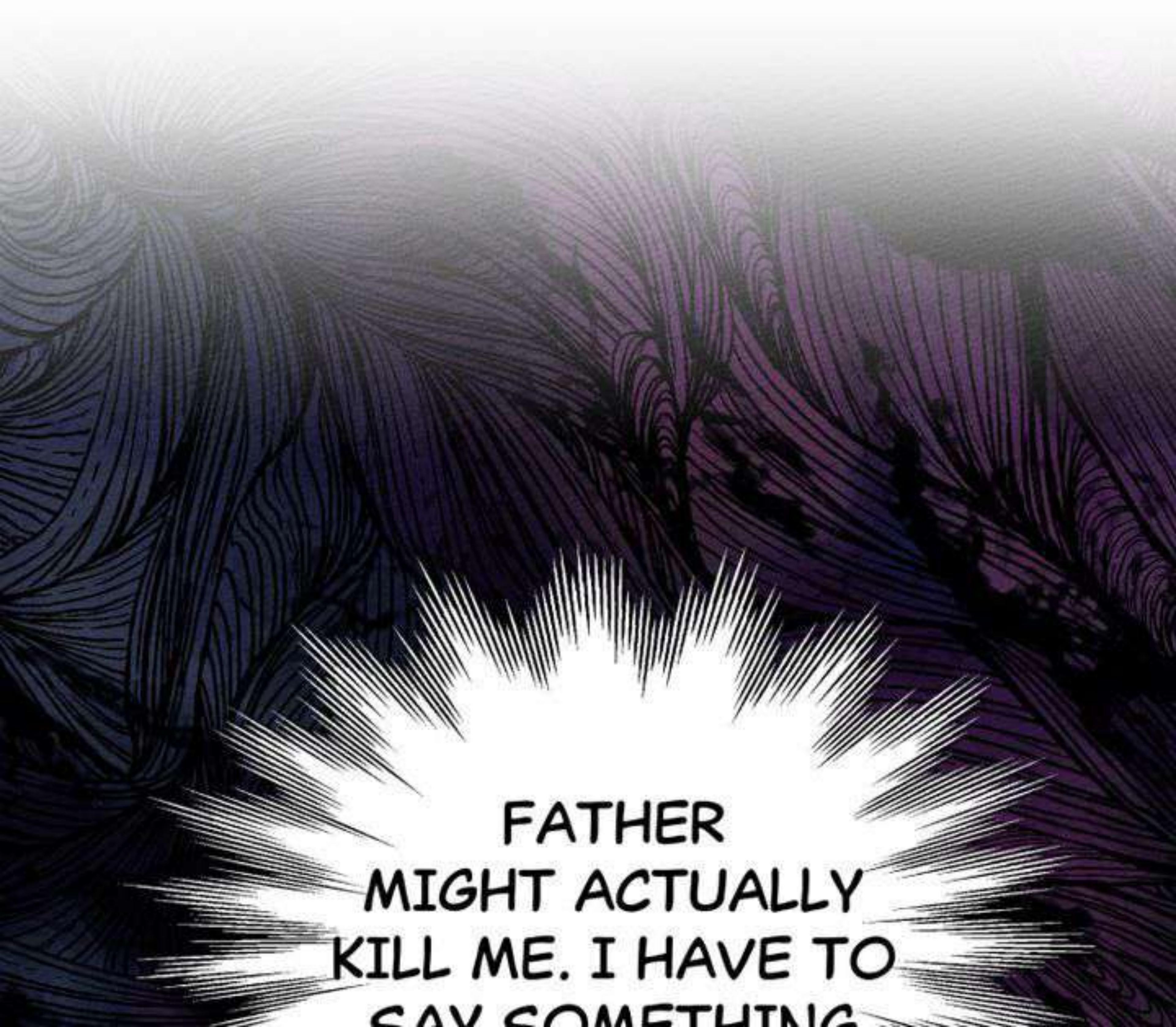

OH NO.
I MUST HAVE
ANNOYED HIM.
IS HE MAD?
SHRIVEL..

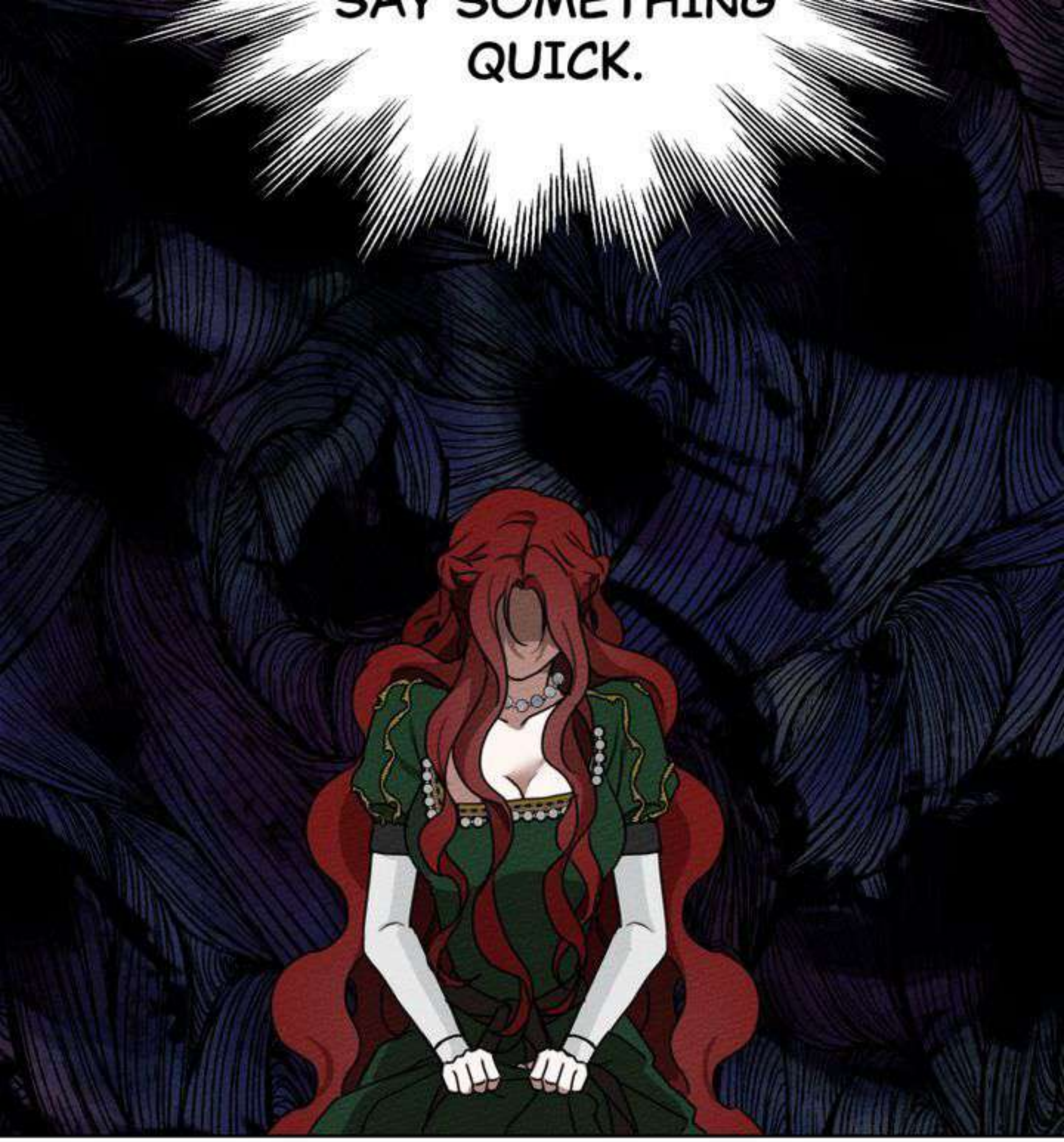

...
IS BEING WITH ME SUCH A HORRIBLE THING?

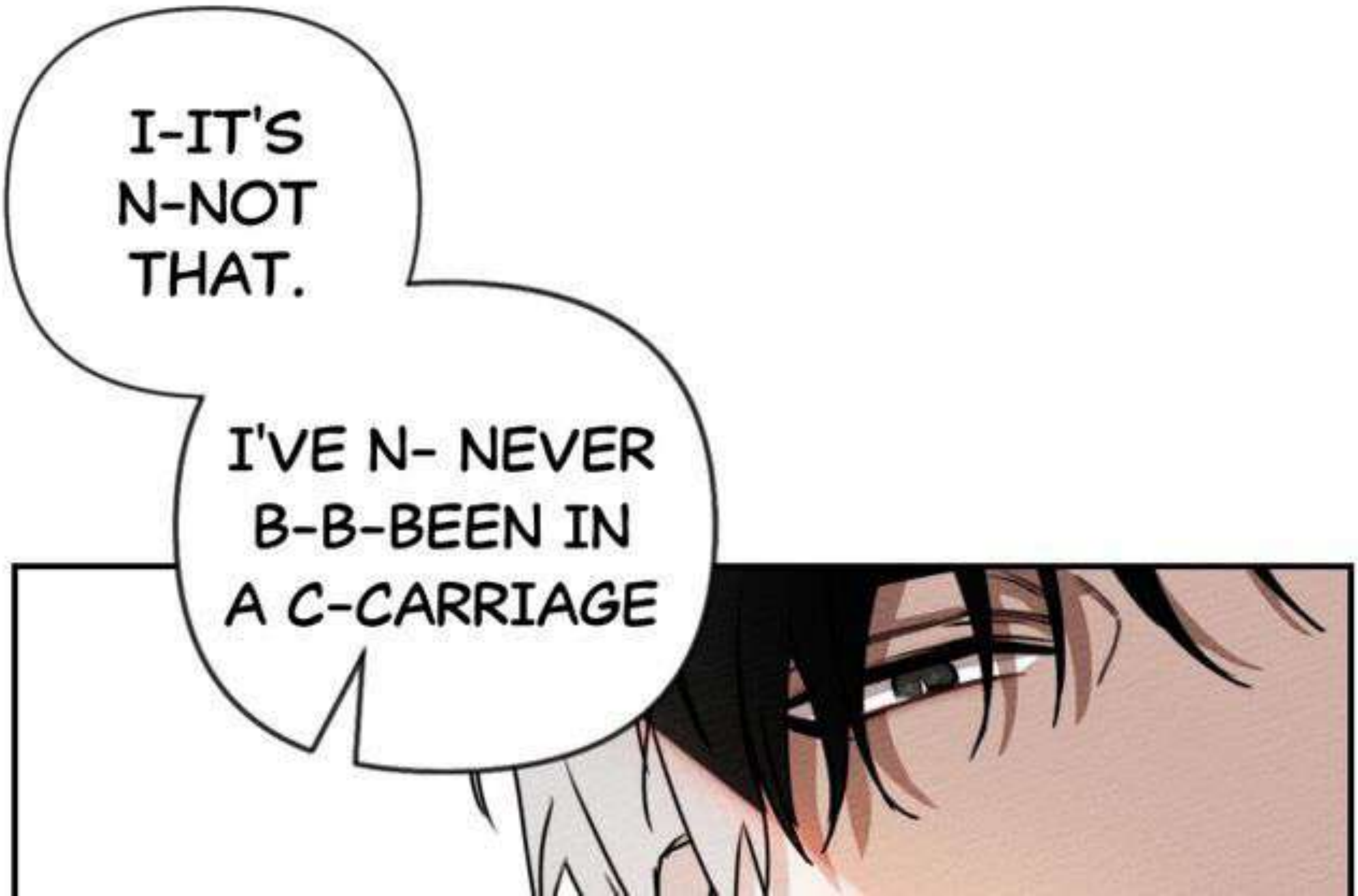

N-NO.
THAT'S
N-NOT...!

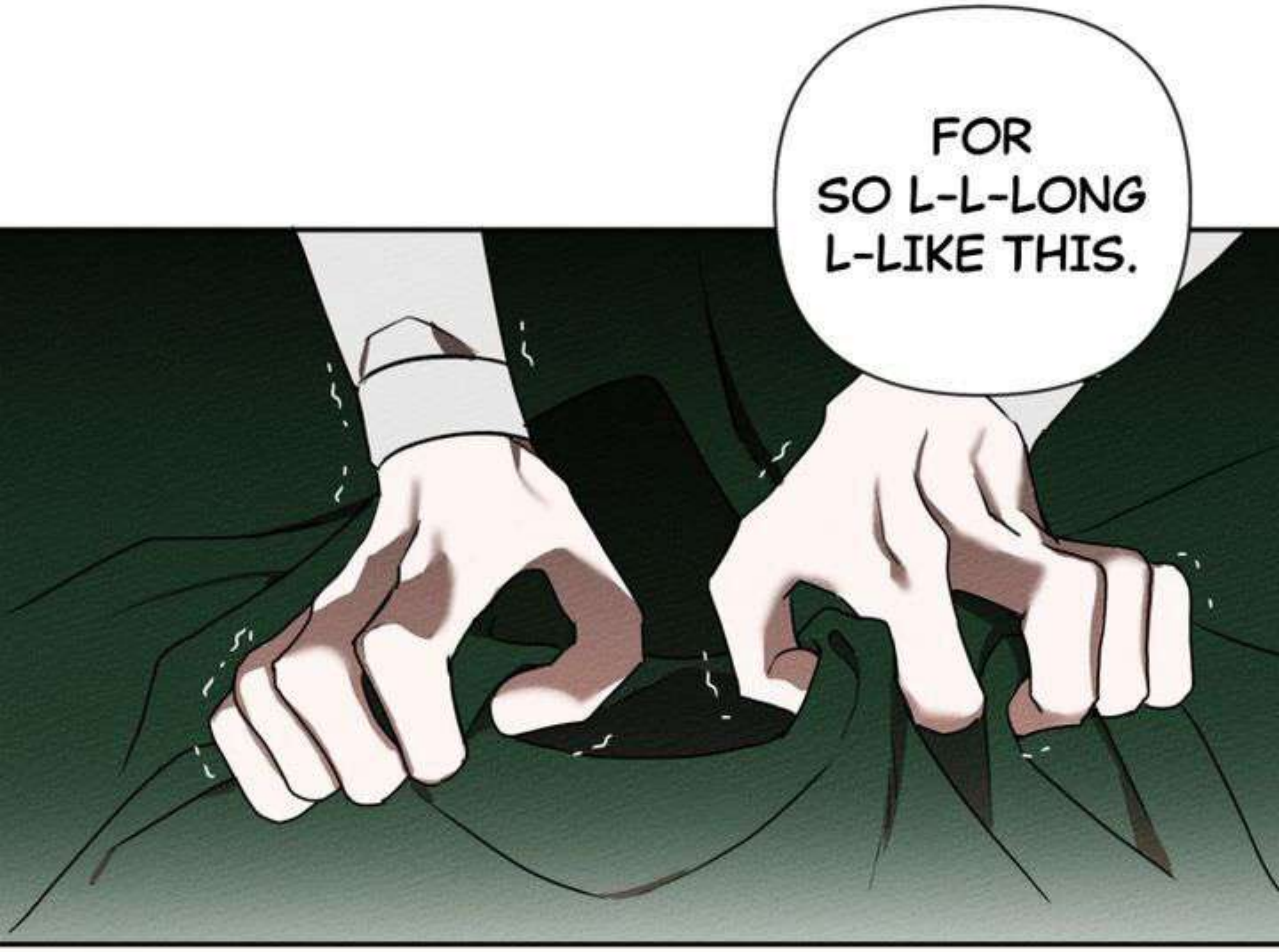

THEN WHAT?
IS IT THAT YOU HATE COMING WITH ME? OR THAT YOU WANT TO GO BACK?
GO BACK? NO! IF I GO BACK,

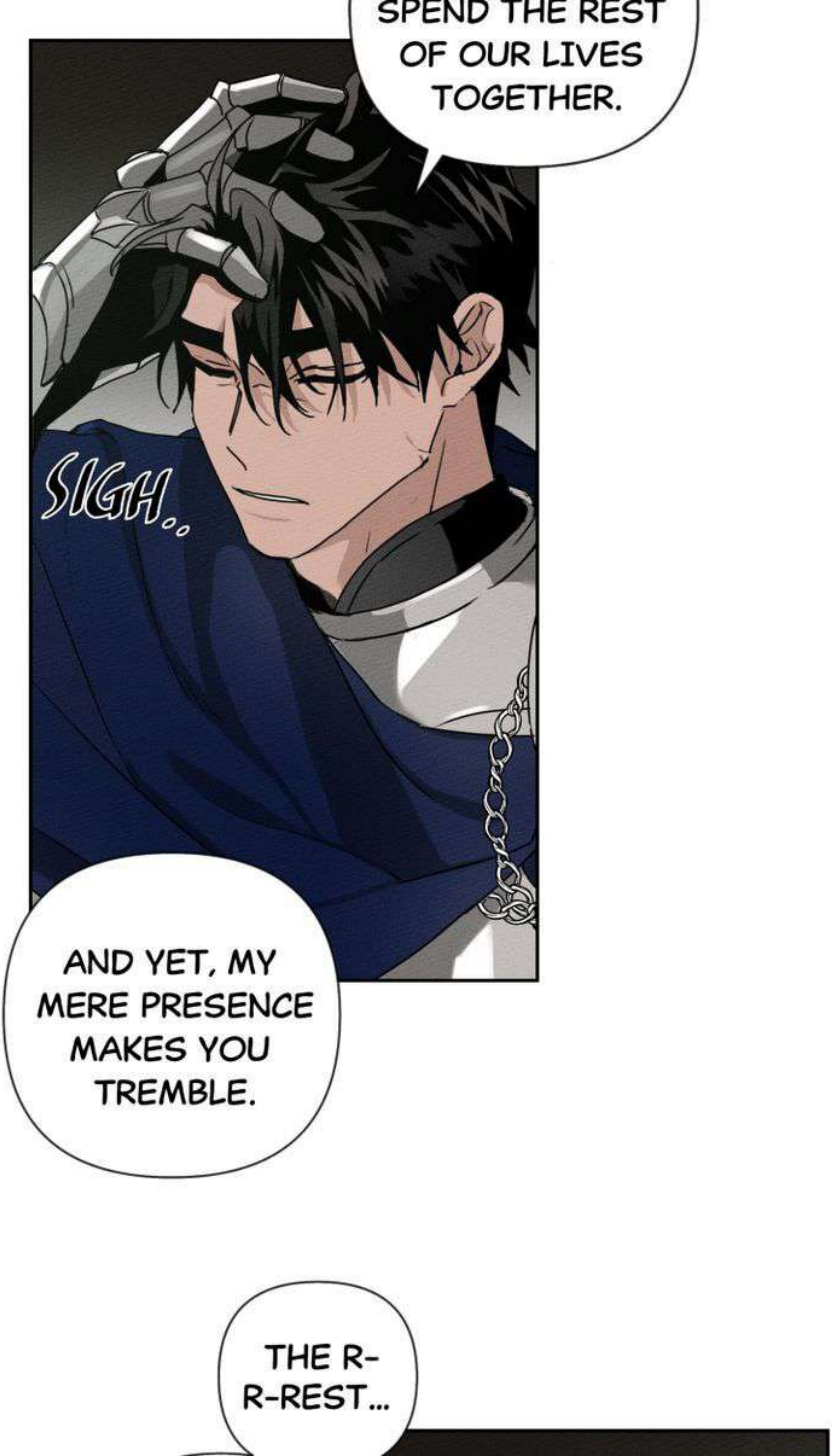

N-NO!

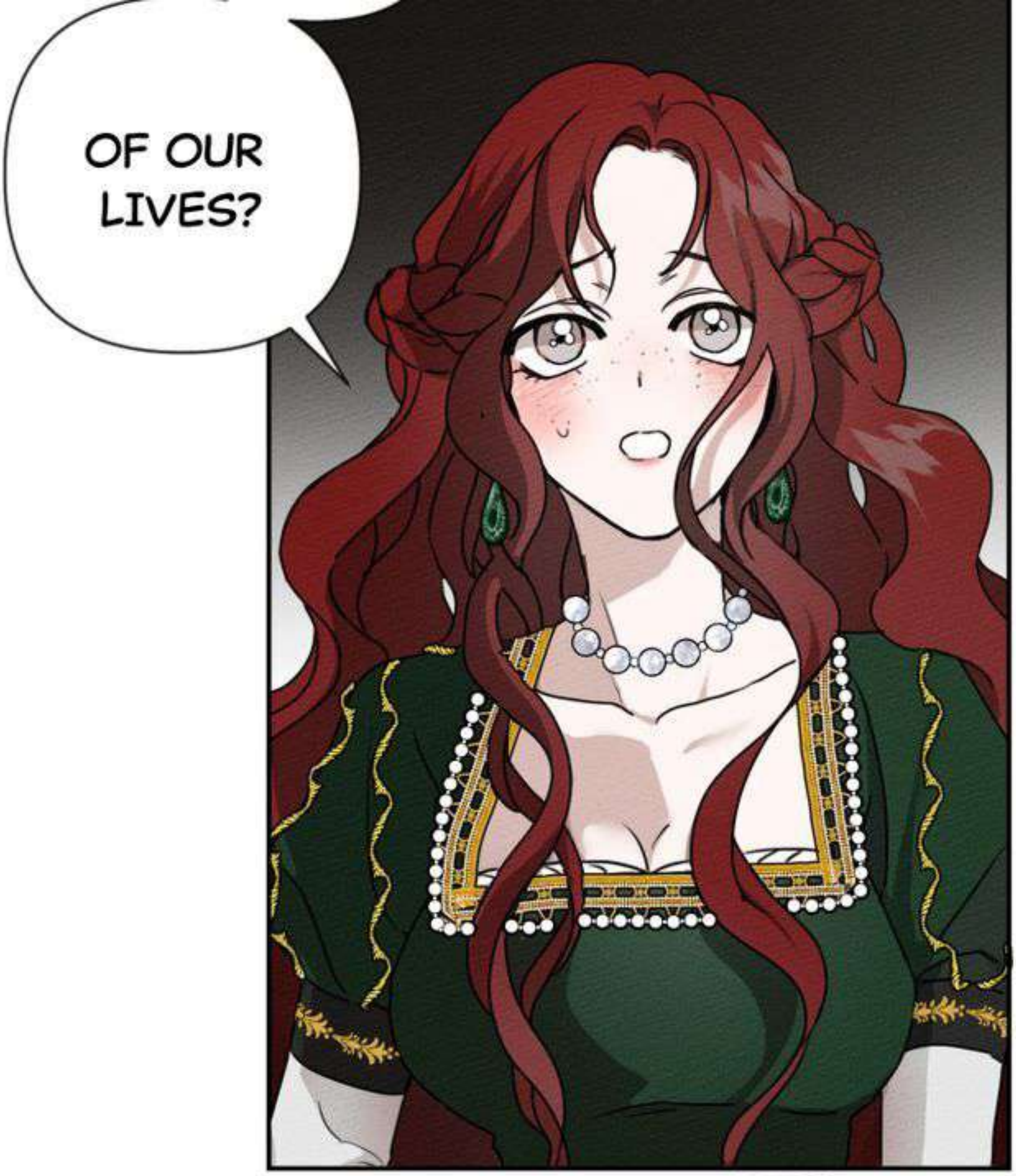

FATHER MIGHT ACTUALLY KILL ME. I HAVE TO SAY SOMETHING

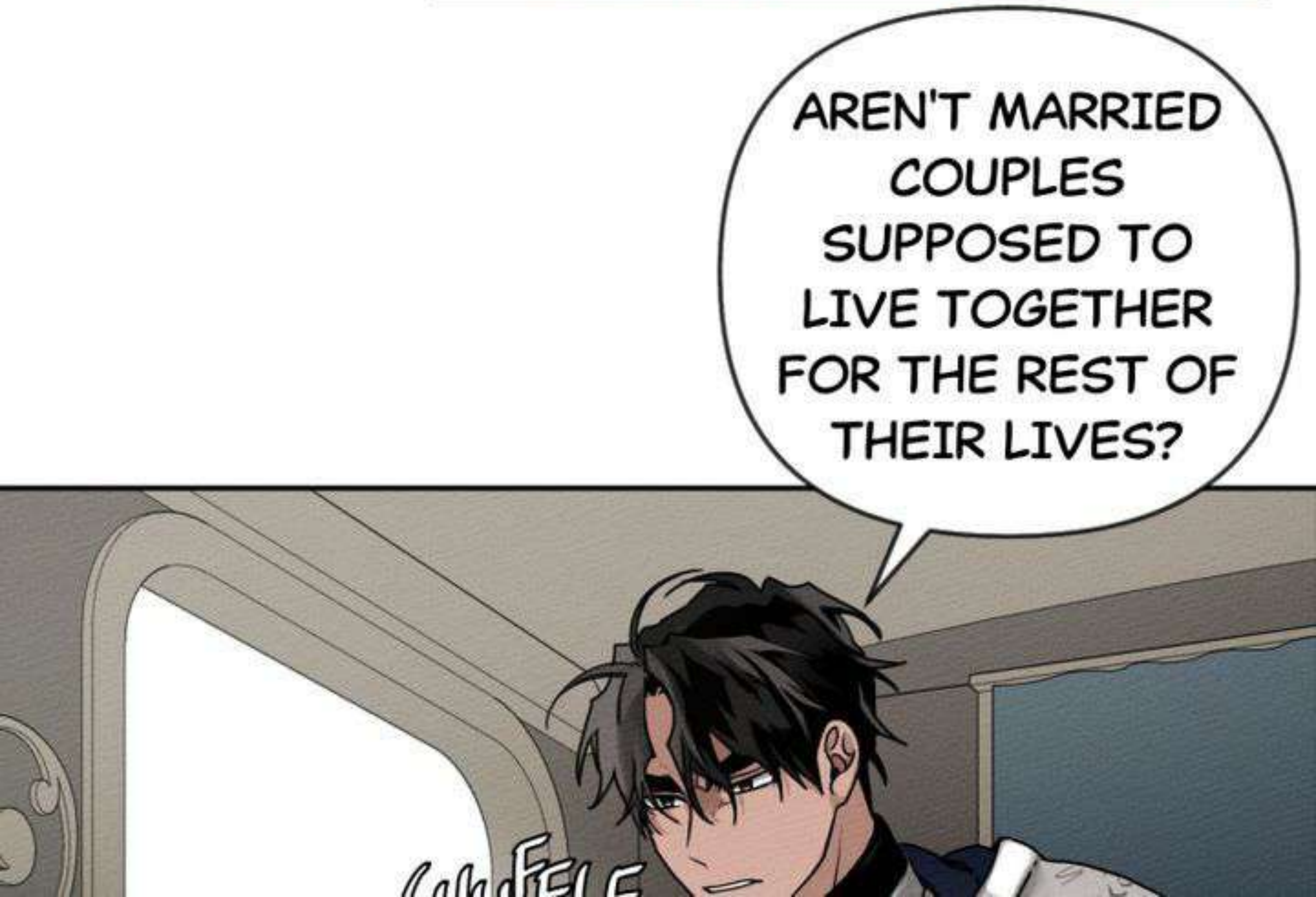

SAY SOMETHING
QUICK.

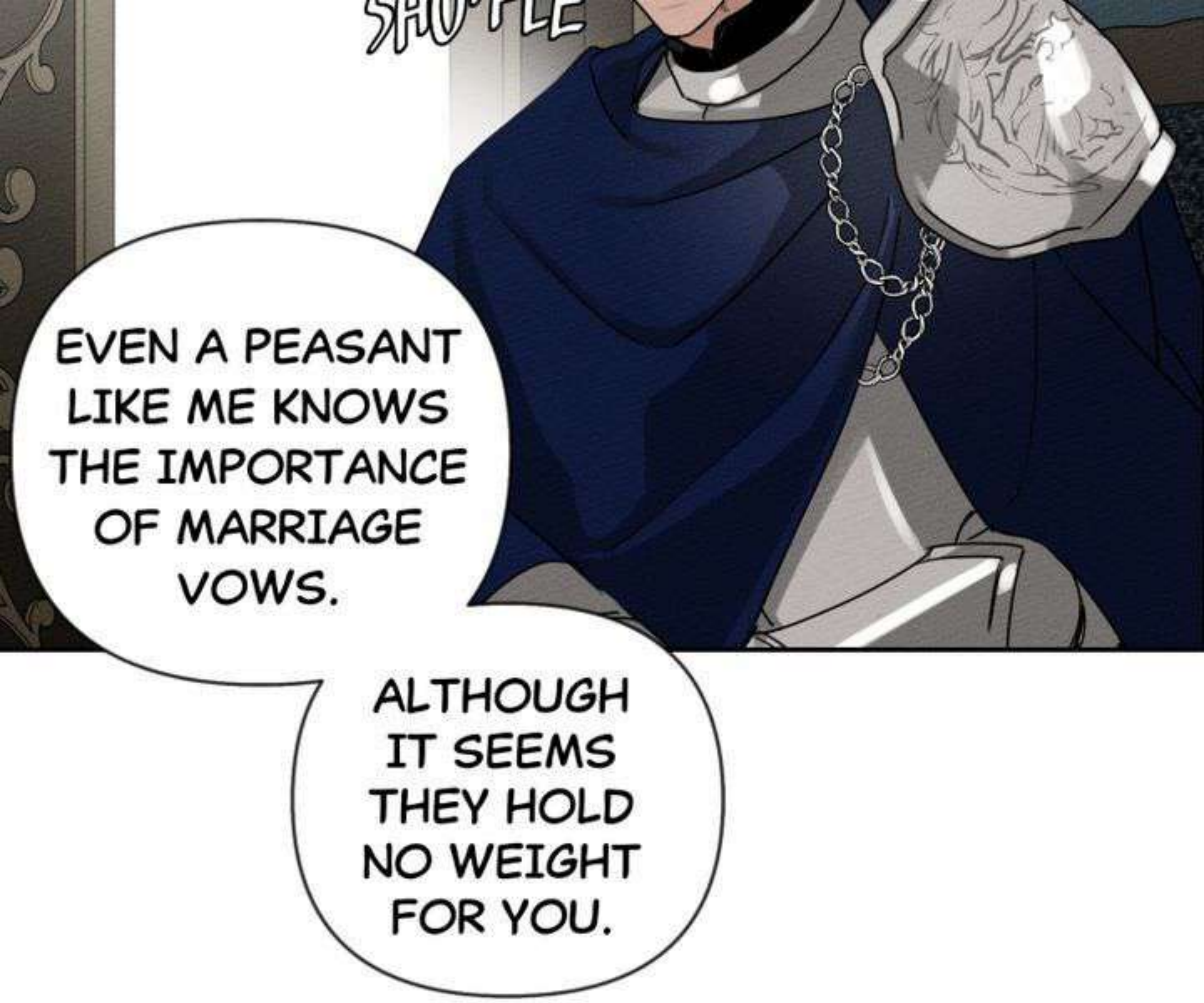

I-IT'S N-NOT THAT.
I'VE N- NEVER B-B-BEEN IN A C-CARRIAGE

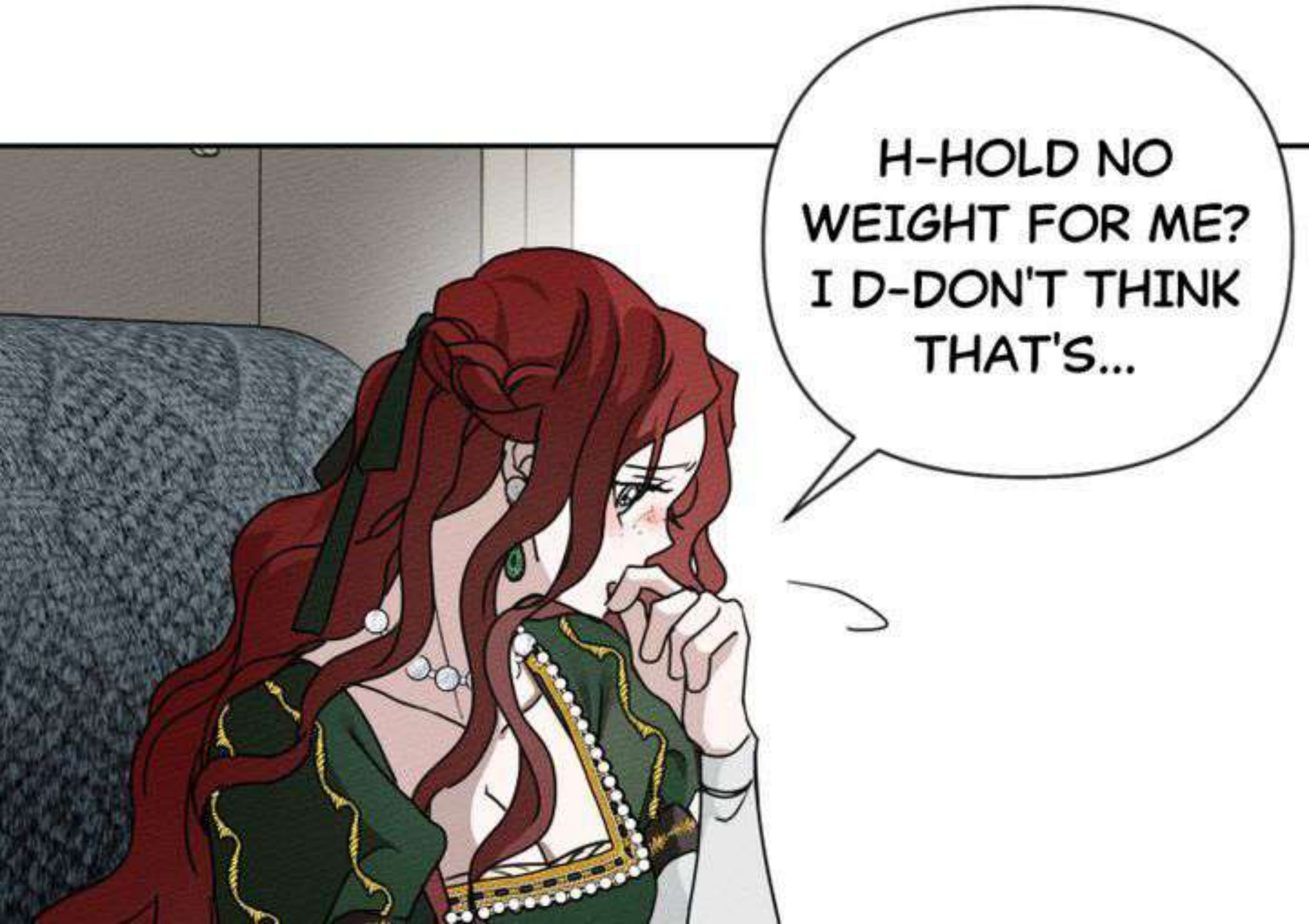

FOR SO L-L-LONG L-LIKE THIS.
I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT YOU, AND YOU PROBABLY DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT ME EITHER.
BUT WE'RE GOING TO

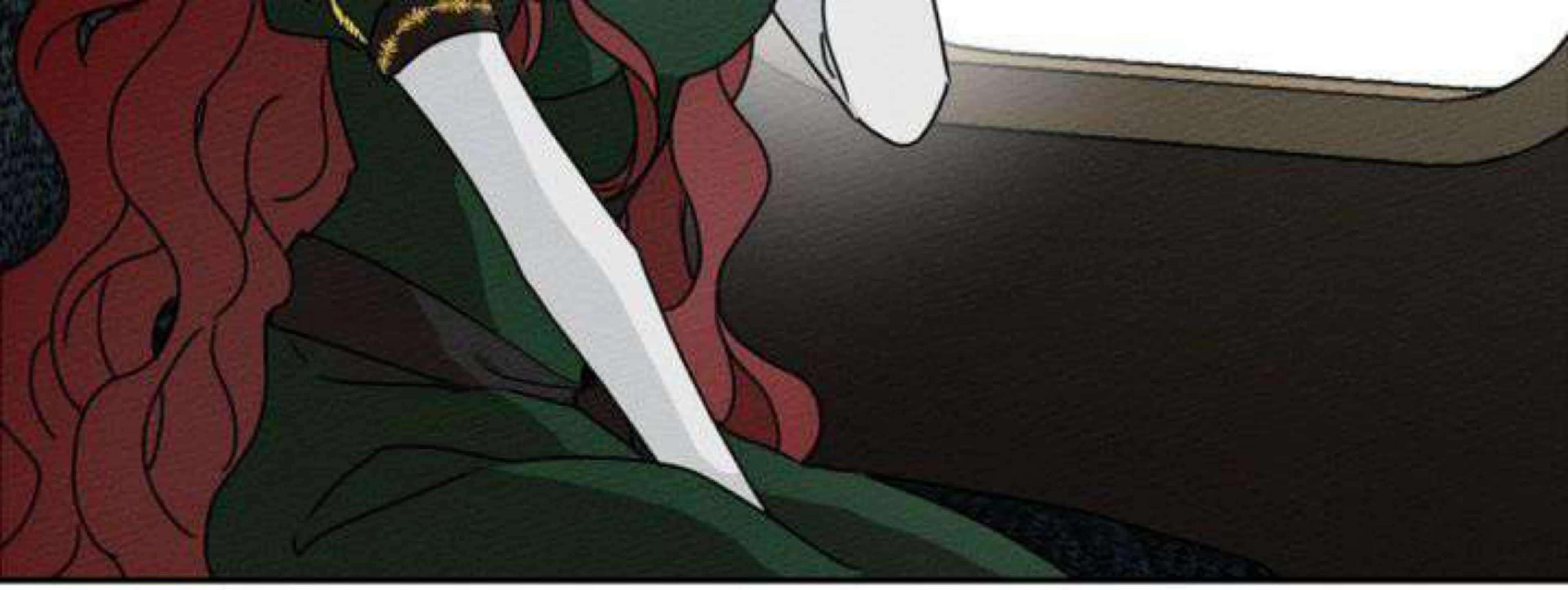

SPEND THE REST OF OUR LIVES TOGETHER.
SIGH..
AND YET, MY MERE PRESENCE MAKES YOU TREMBLE.
THE R- R-REST...

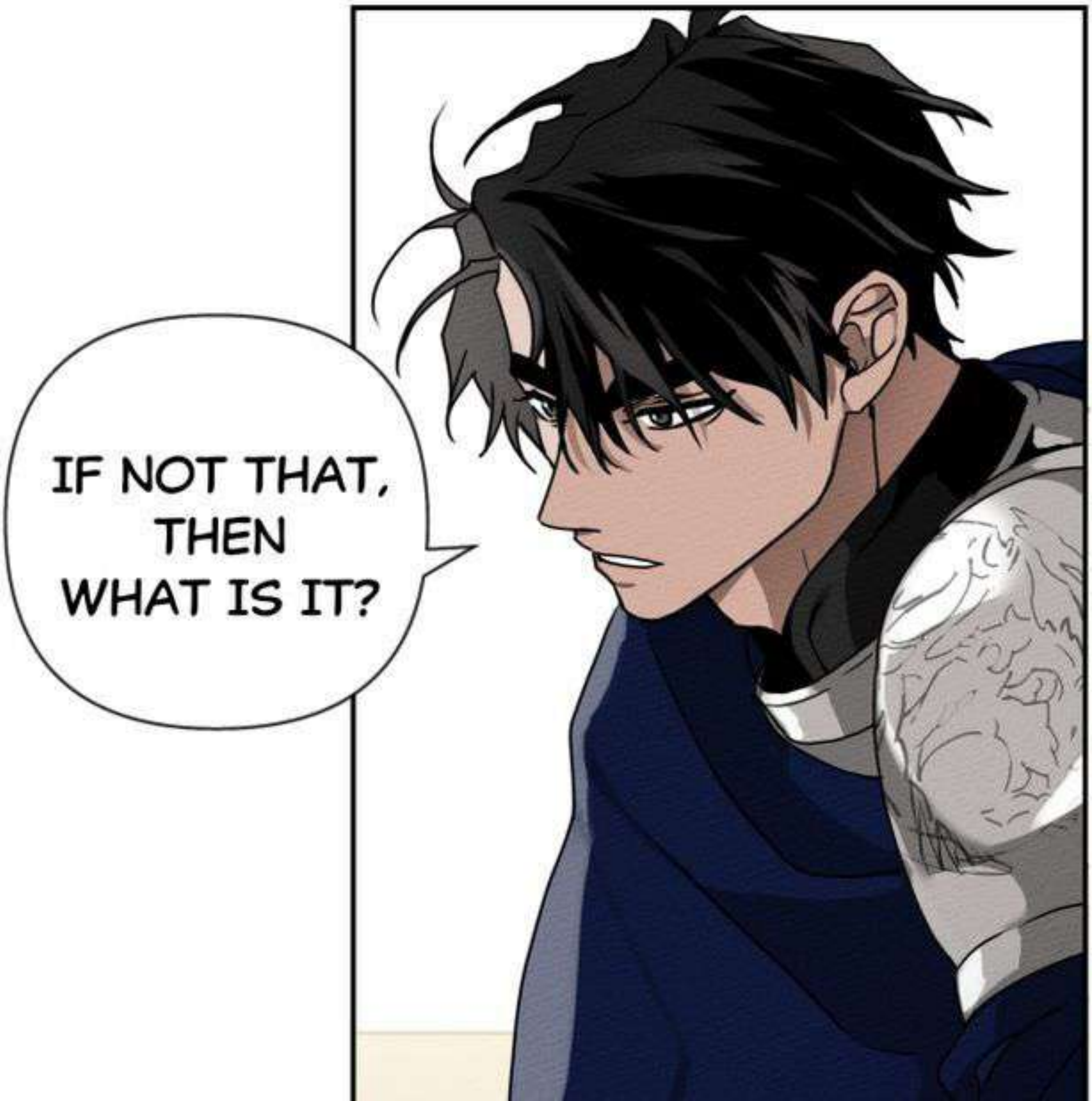

OF OUR LIVES?

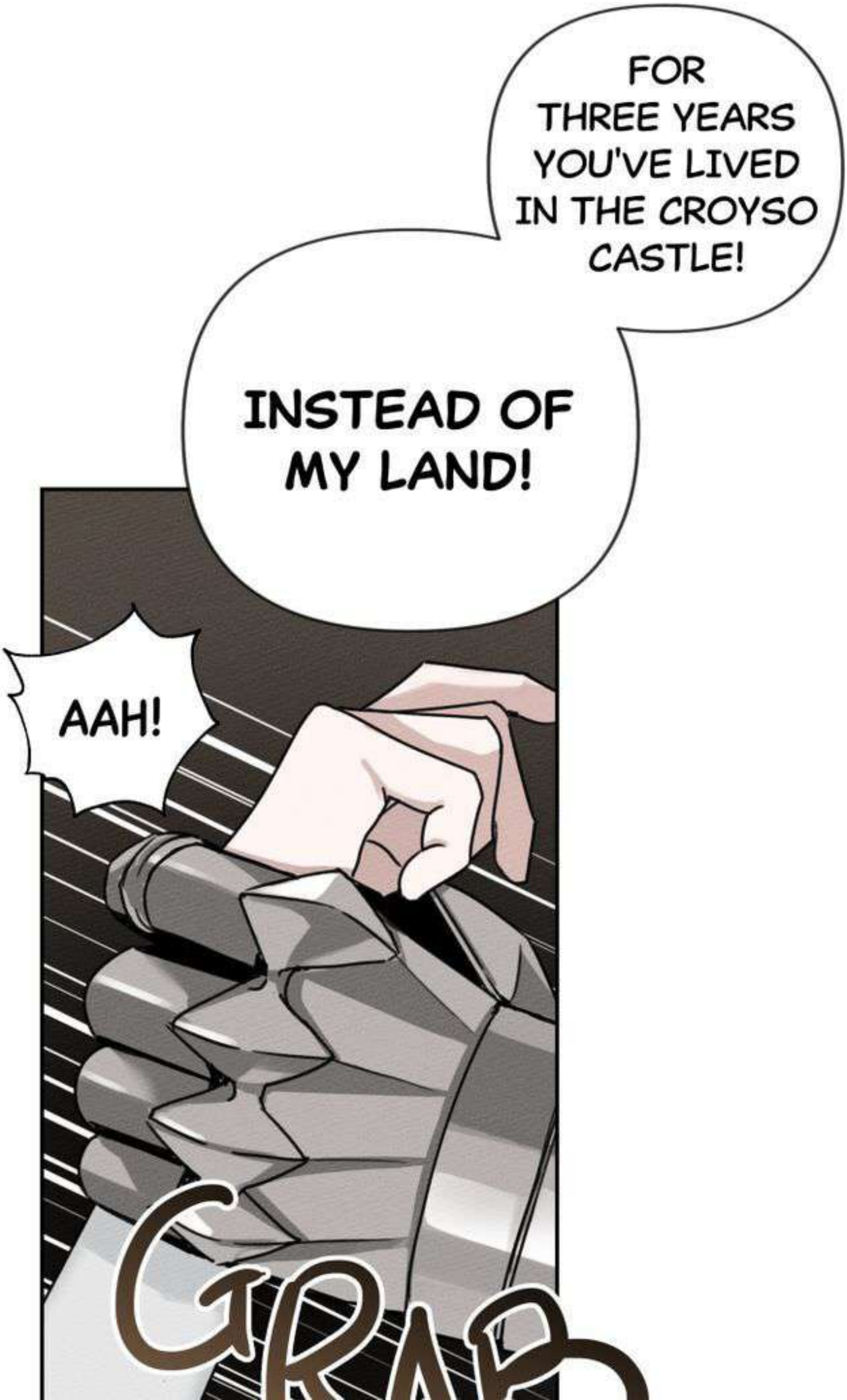

AREN'T MARRIED COUPLES SUPPOSED TO LIVE TOGETHER FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES?

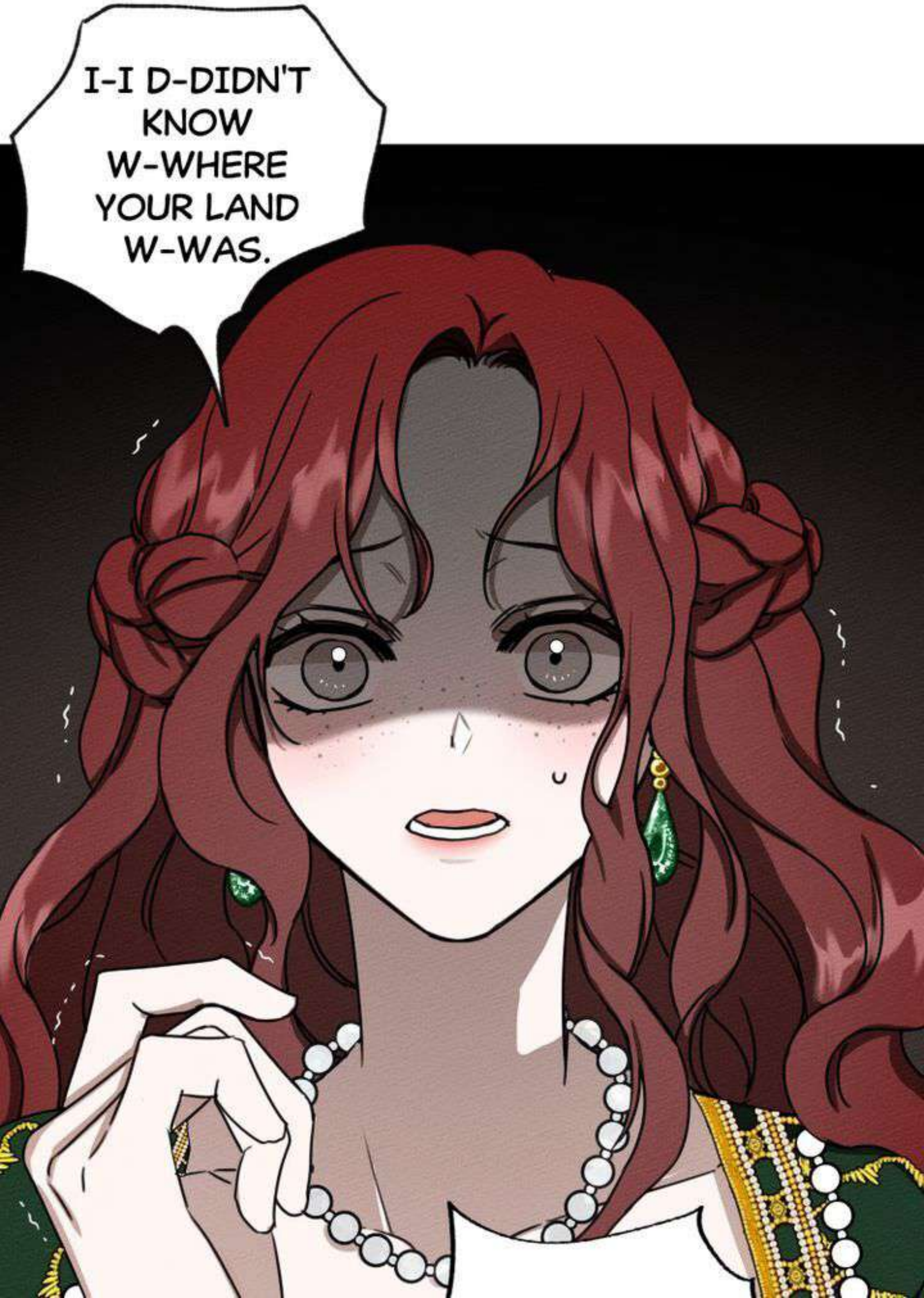

SHUFFLE
EVEN A PEASANT LIKE ME KNOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE VOWS.
ALTHOUGH IT SEEMS THEY HOLD NO WEIGHT FOR YOU.

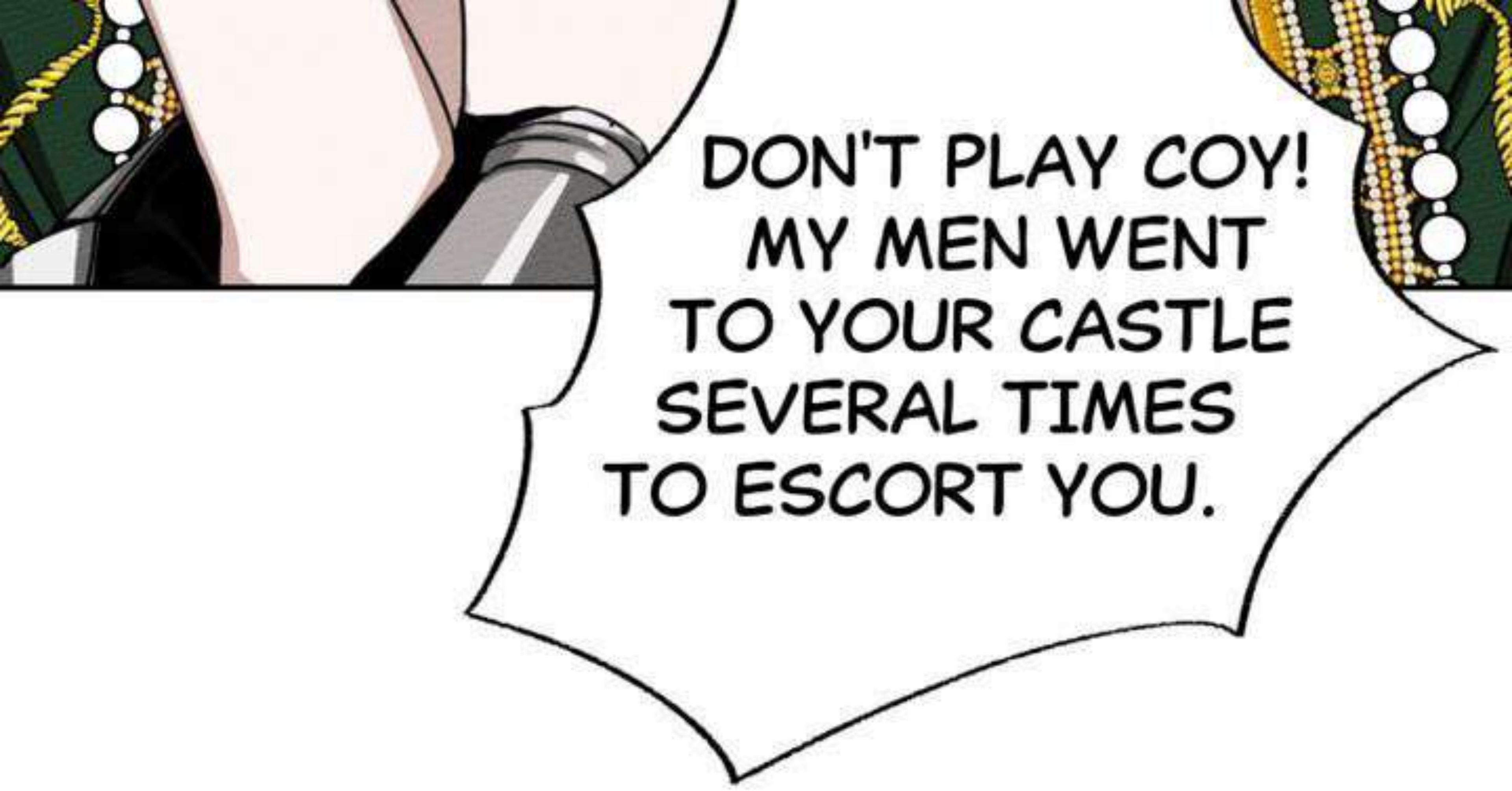

H-HOLD NO WEIGHT FOR ME? I D-DON'T THINK THAT'S...

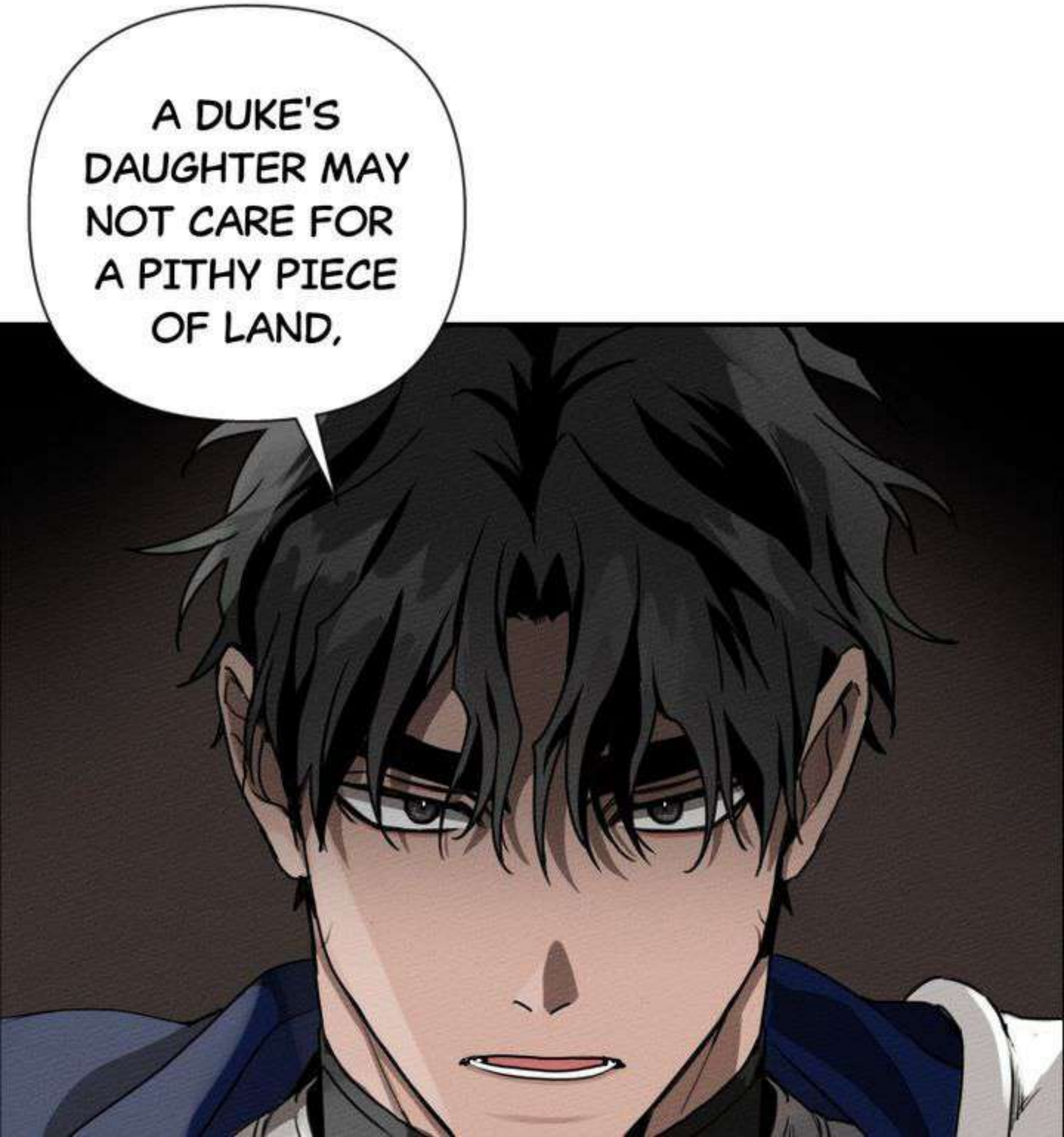


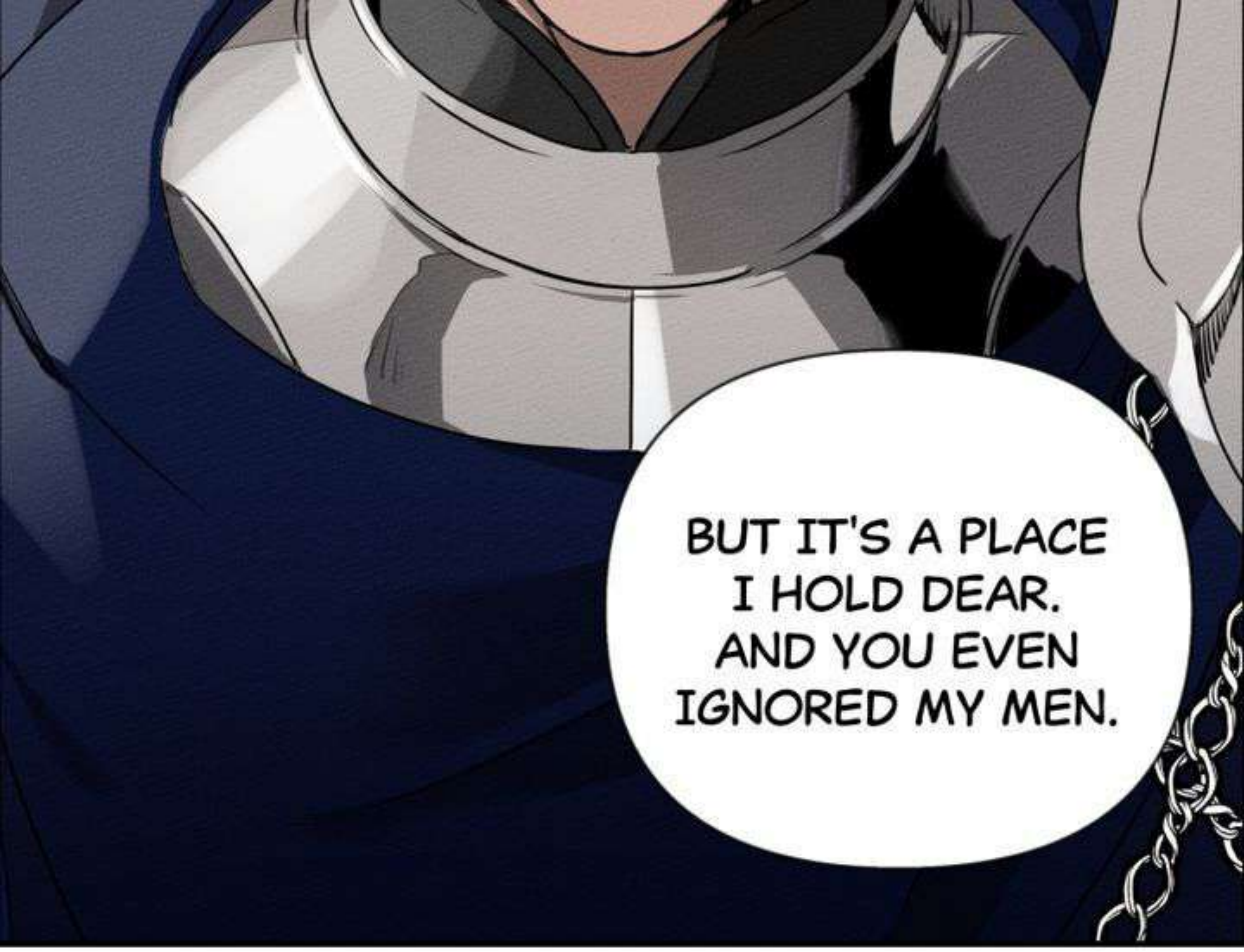

IF NOT THAT, THEN WHAT IS IT?

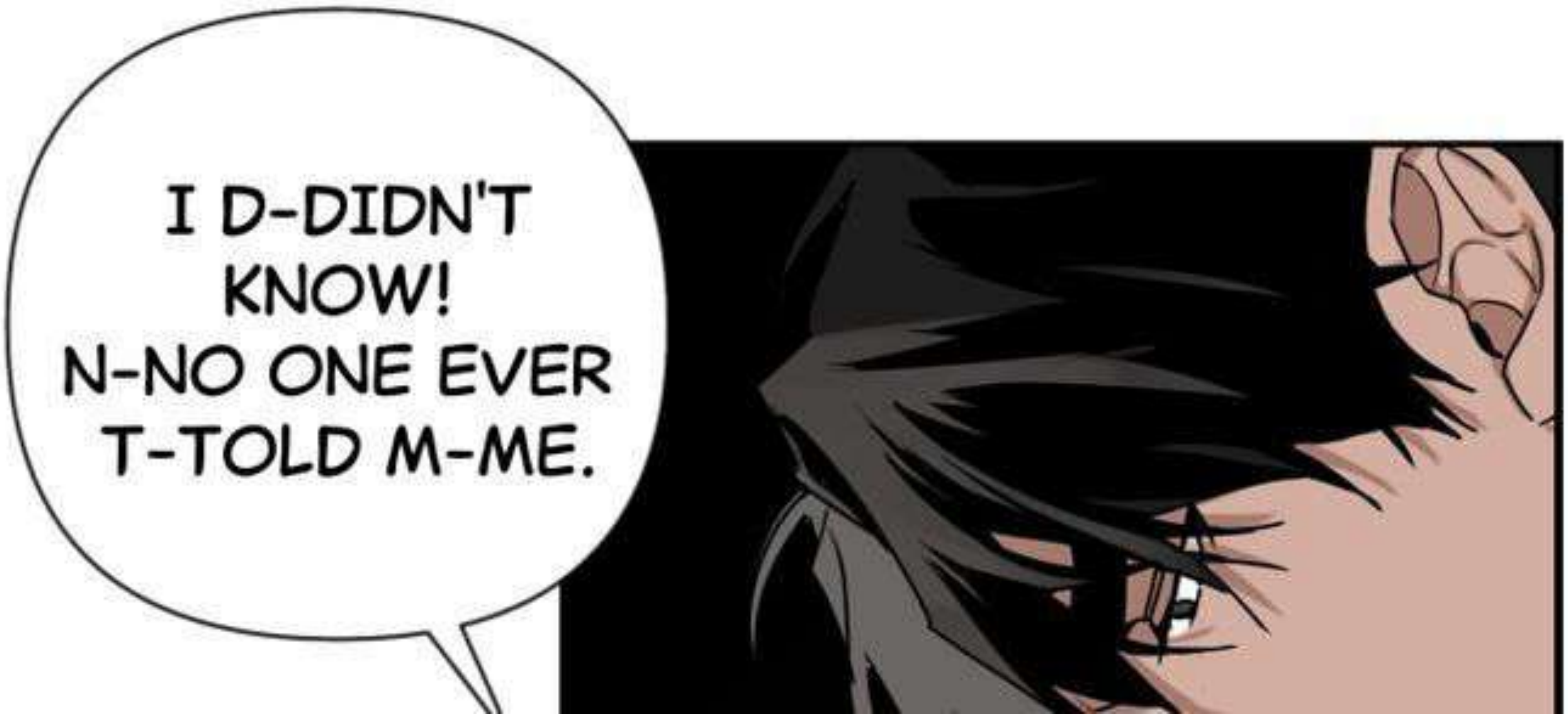

FOR THREE YEARS YOU'VE LIVED IN THE CROYSO CASTLE!
INSTEAD OF MY LAND!
AAH!
GRAB

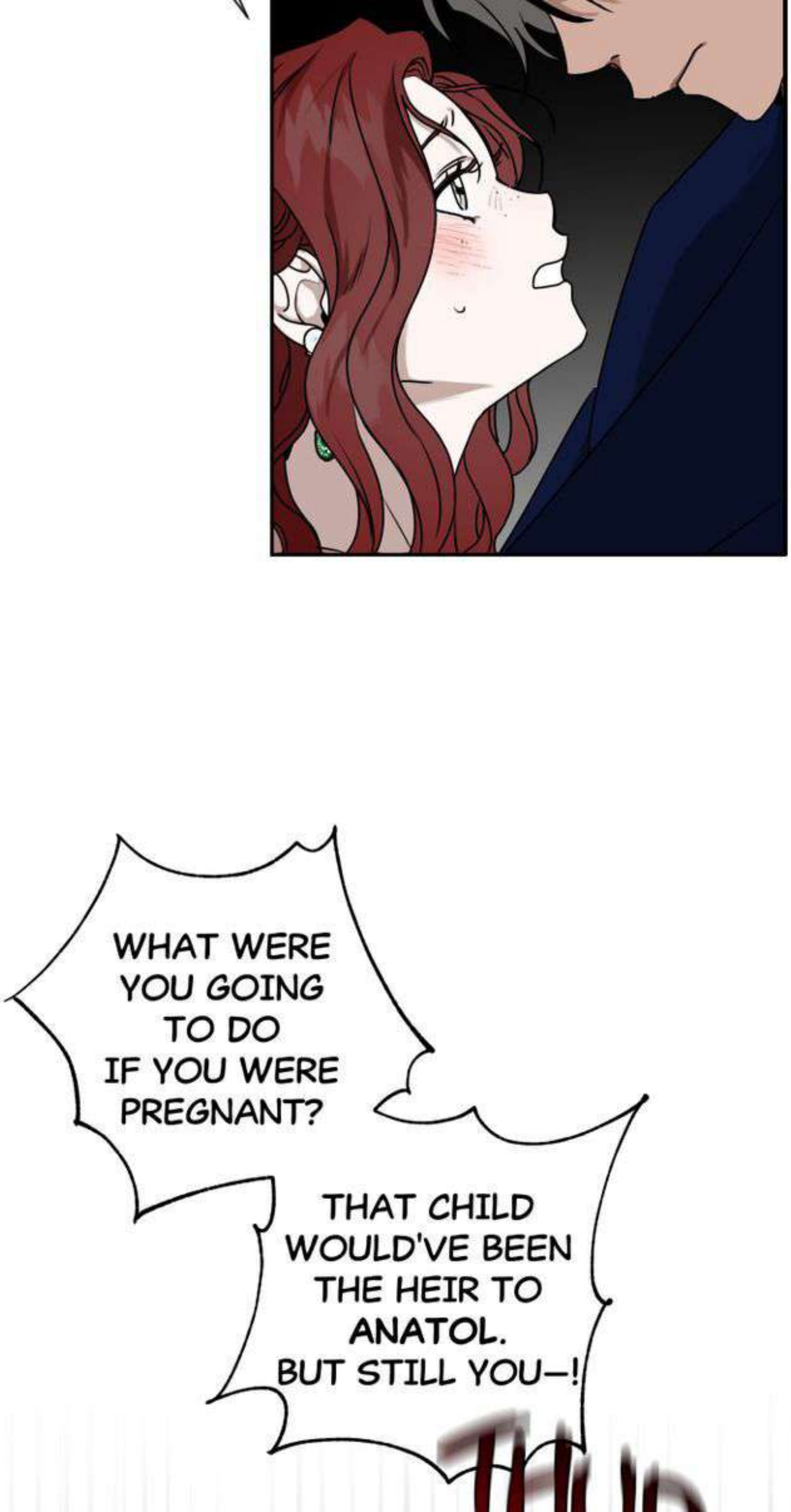

I-I D-DIDN'T KNOW W-WHERE YOUR LAND W-WAS.


DON'T PLAY COY! MY MEN WENT TO YOUR CASTLE SEVERAL TIMES TO ESCORT YOU.

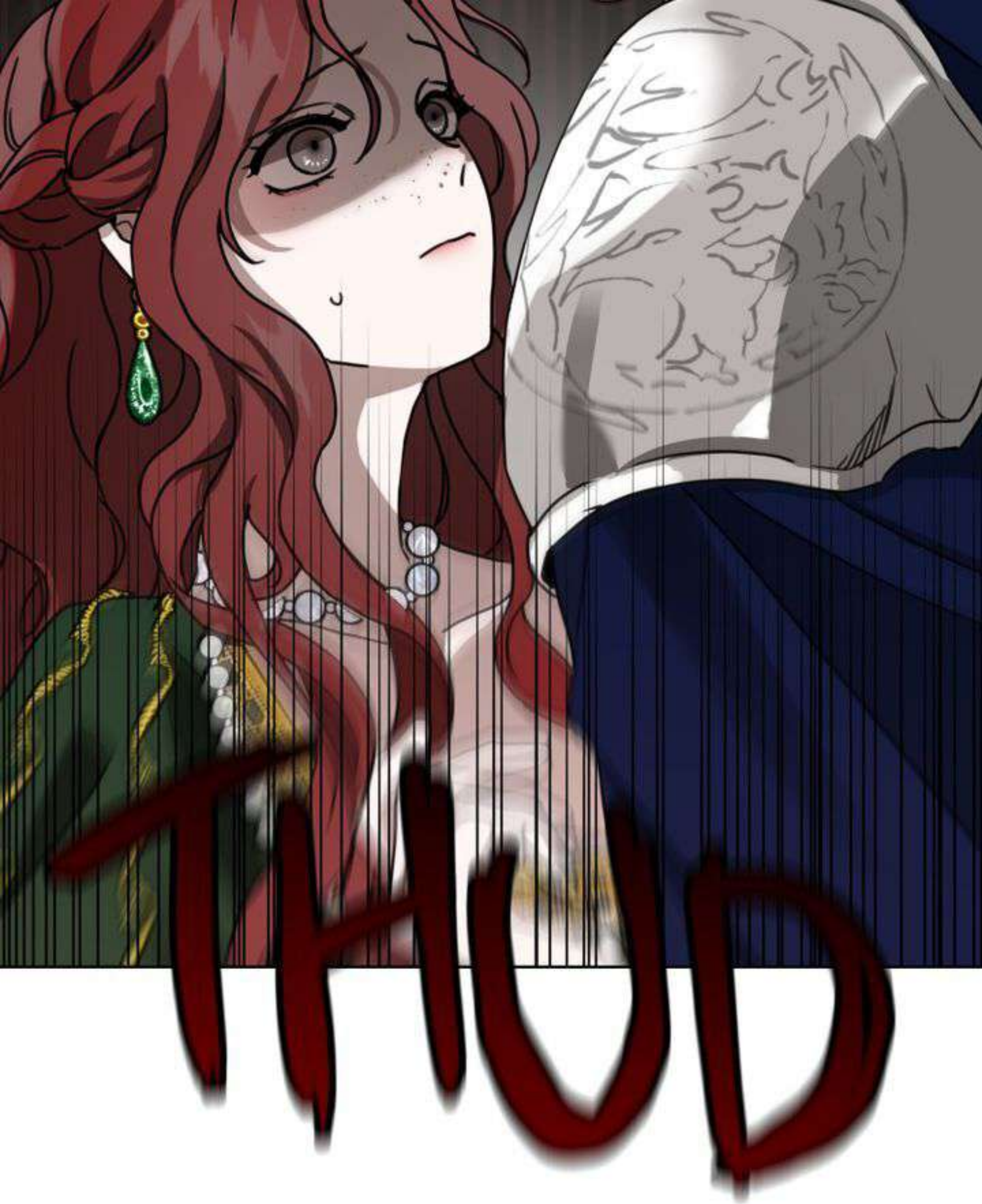

A DUKE'S DAUGHTER MAY NOT CARE FOR A PITHY PIECE OF LAND,


BUT IT'S A PLACE I HOLD DEAR. AND YOU EVEN IGNORED MY MEN.

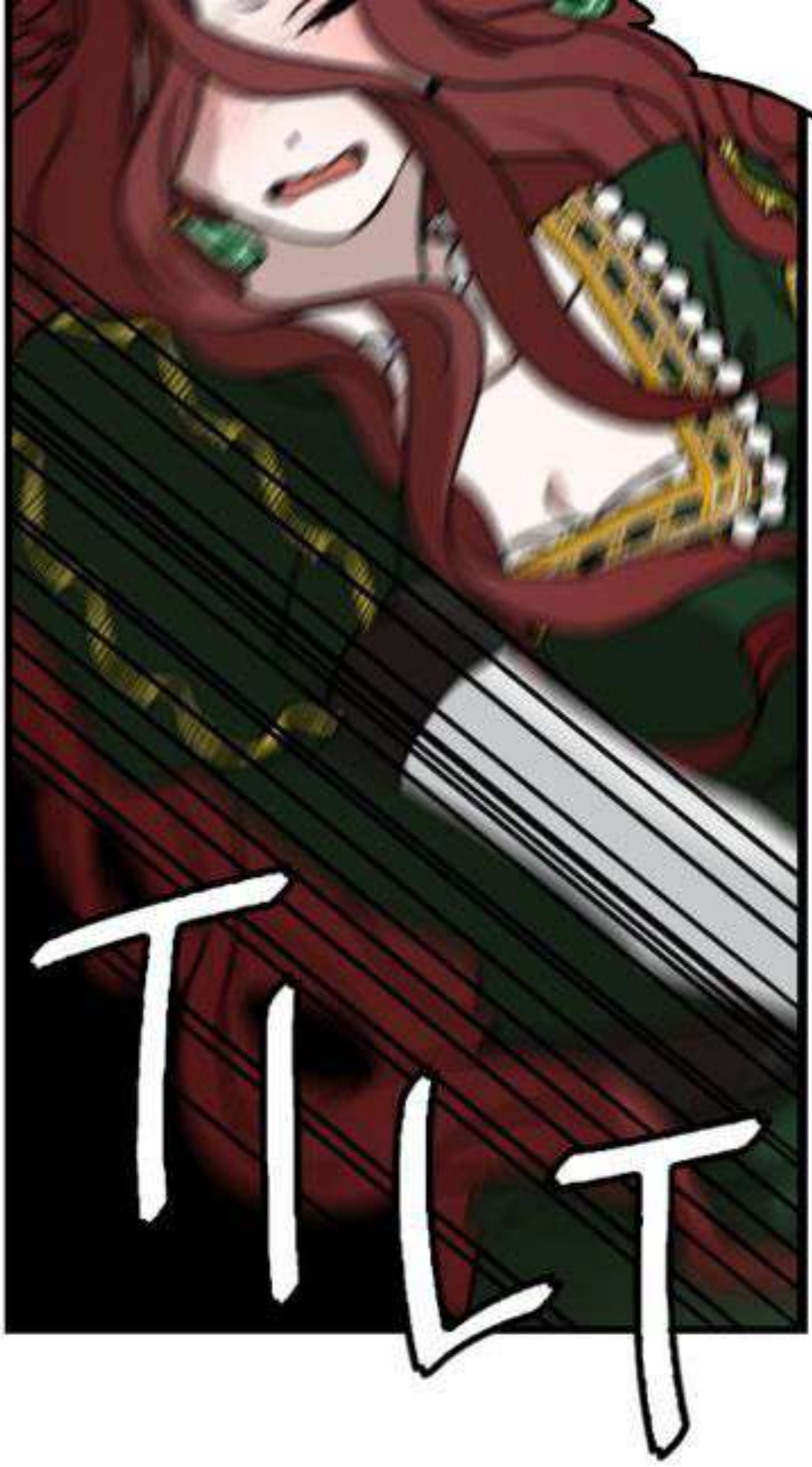

I D-DIDN'T KNOW! N-NO ONE EVER T-TOLD M-ME.

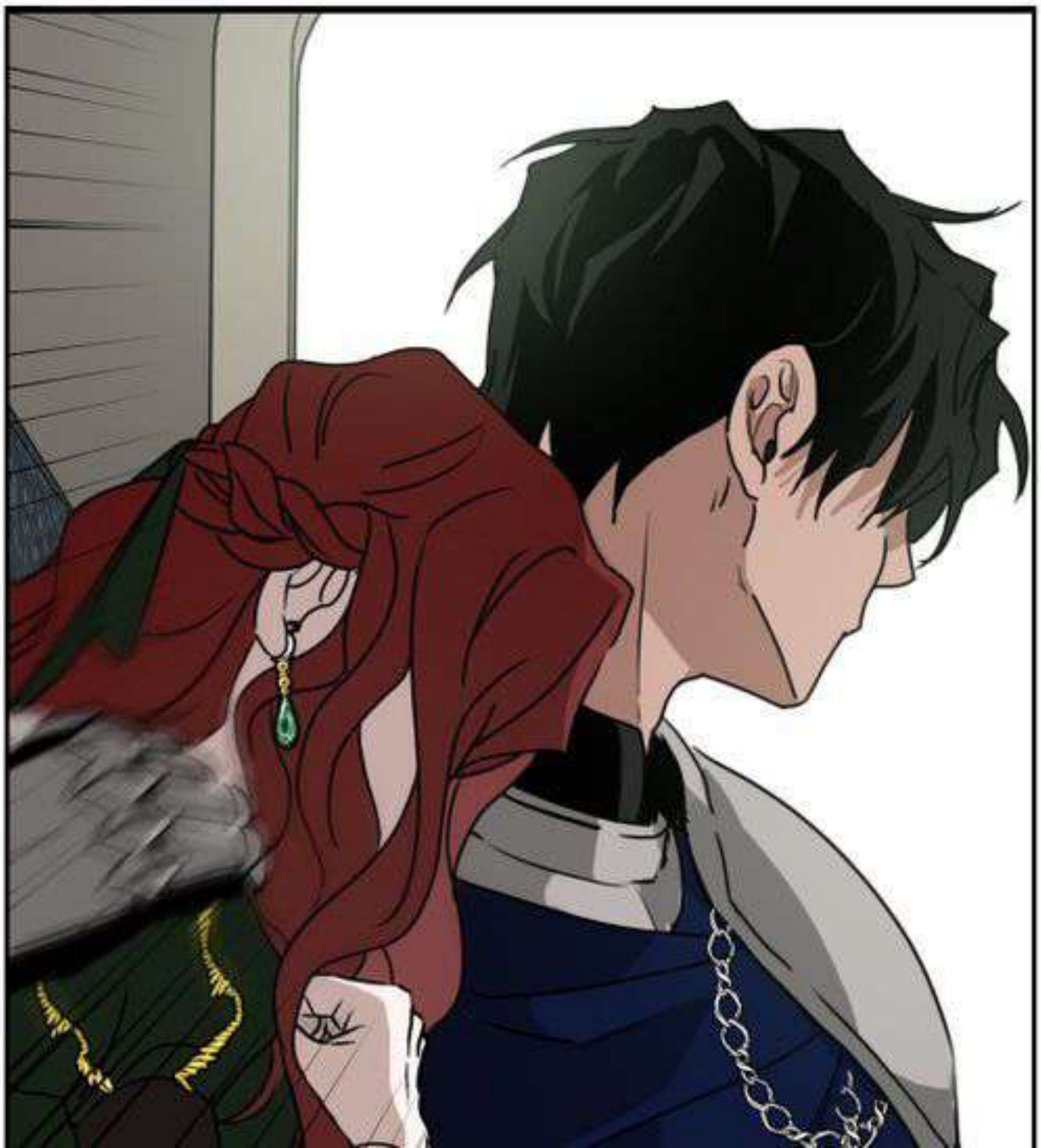

WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO DO IF YOU WERE PREGNANT?
THAT CHILD WOULD'VE BEEN THE HEIR TO ANATOL. BUT STILL YOU—!
THUD

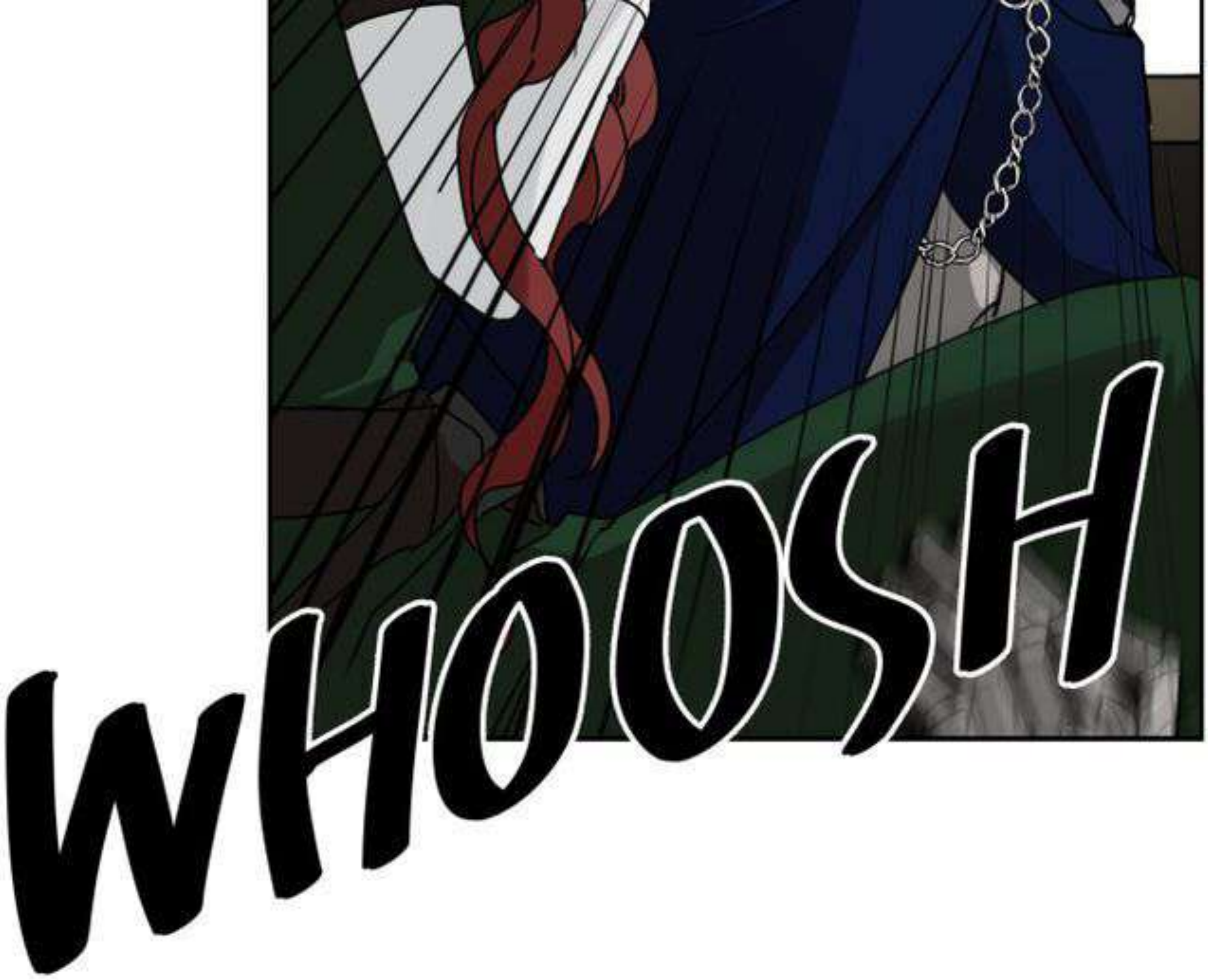
THUD
THUD
!?

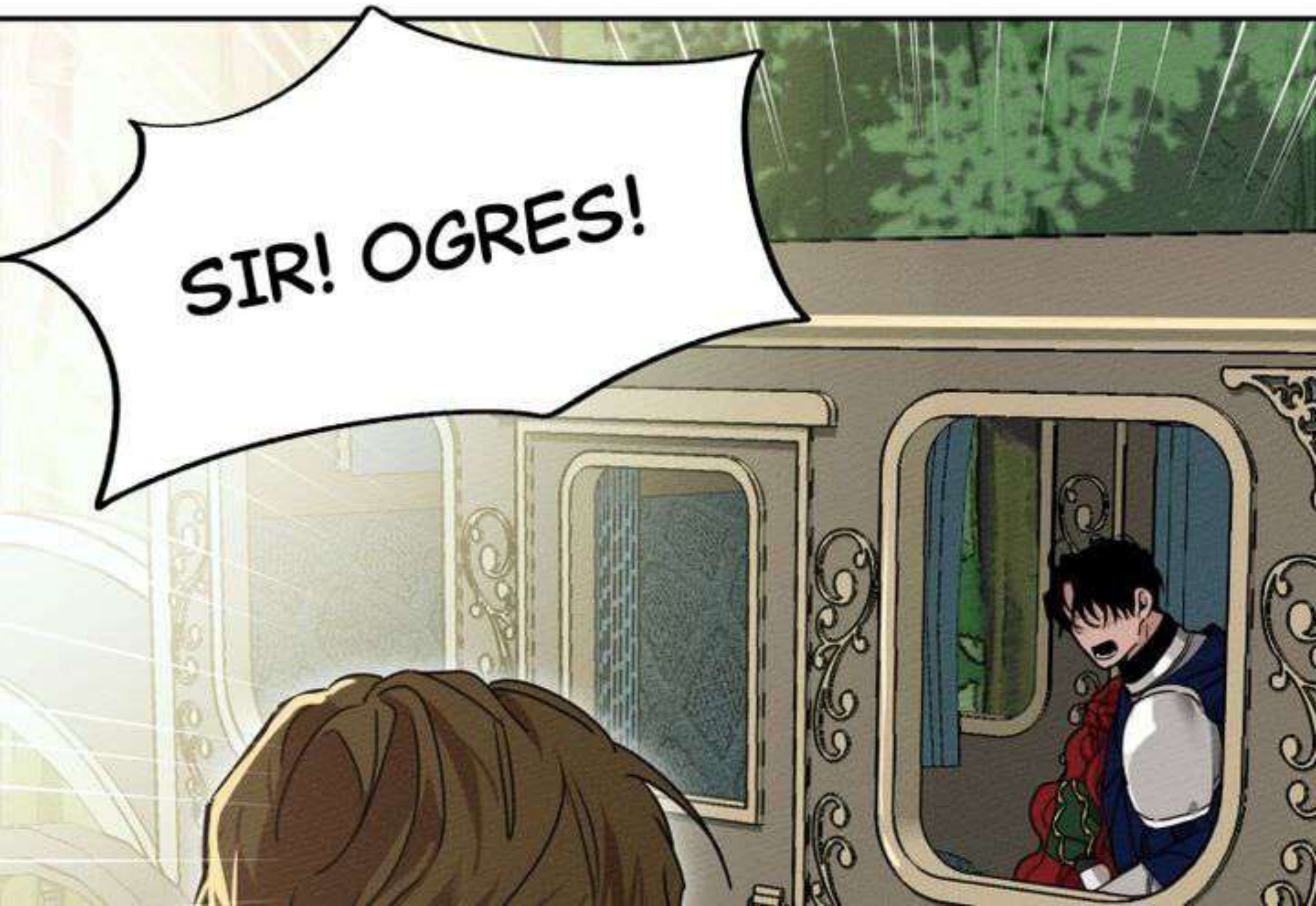

THUD

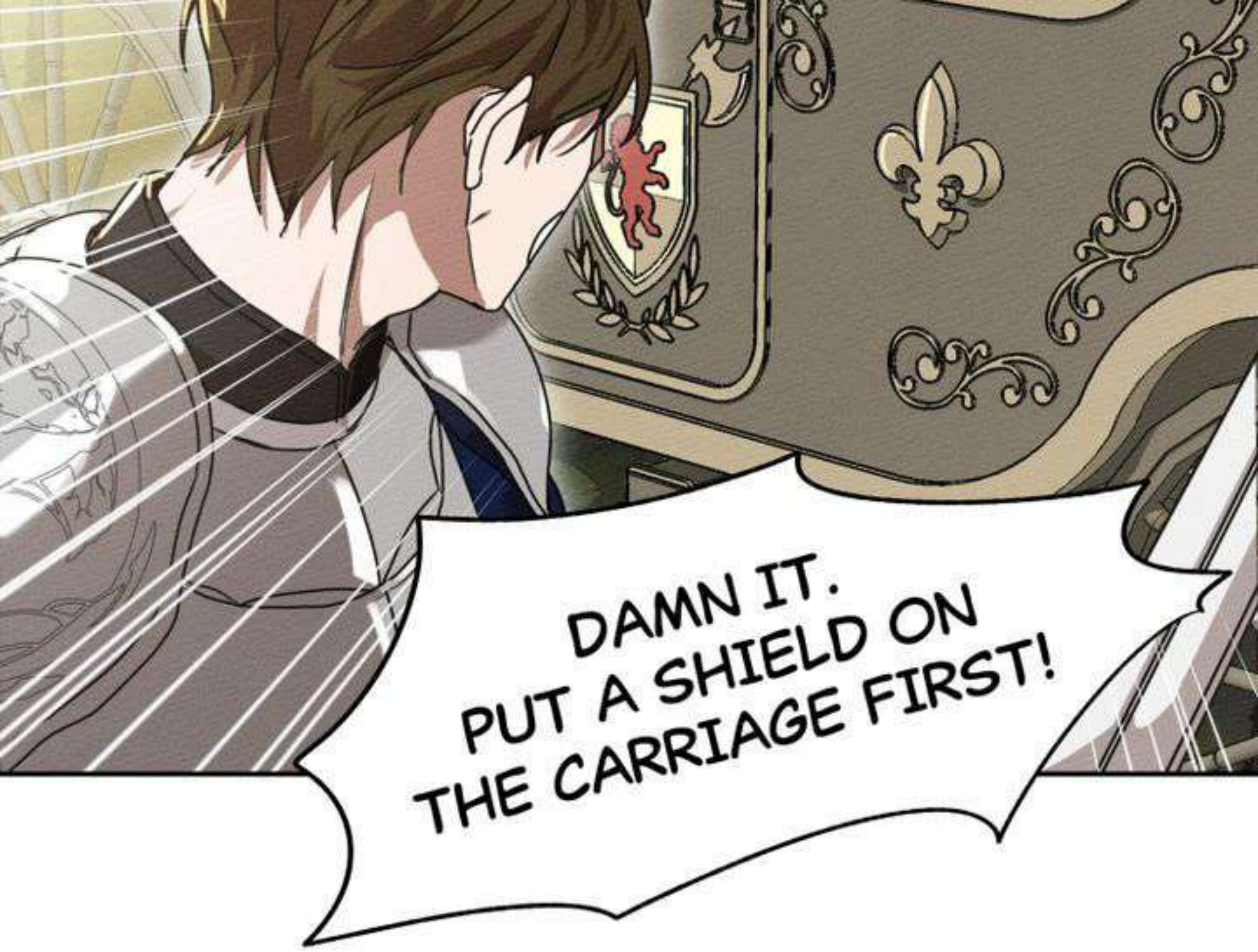
AHH....!


TILT

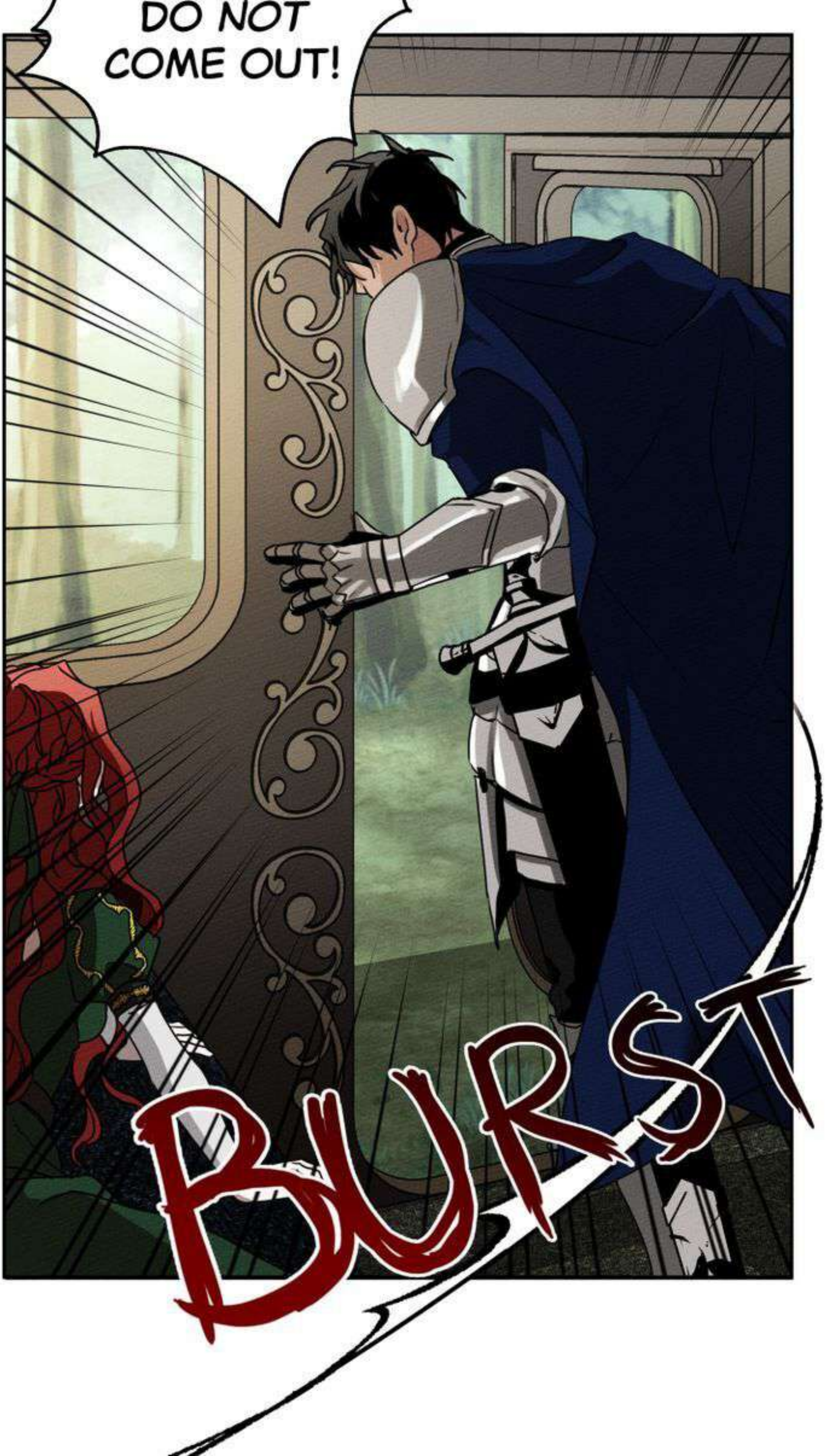


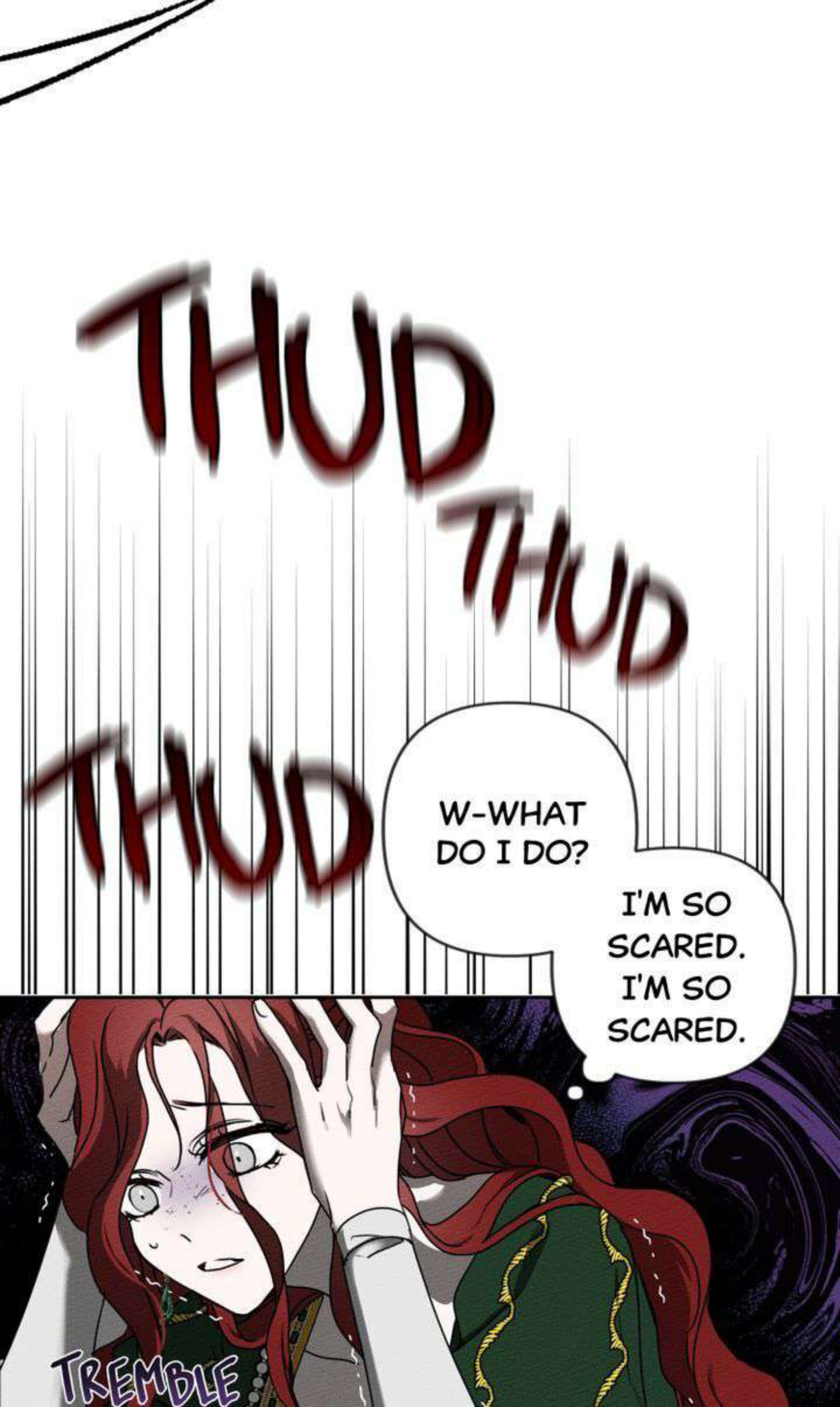

WHOOSH

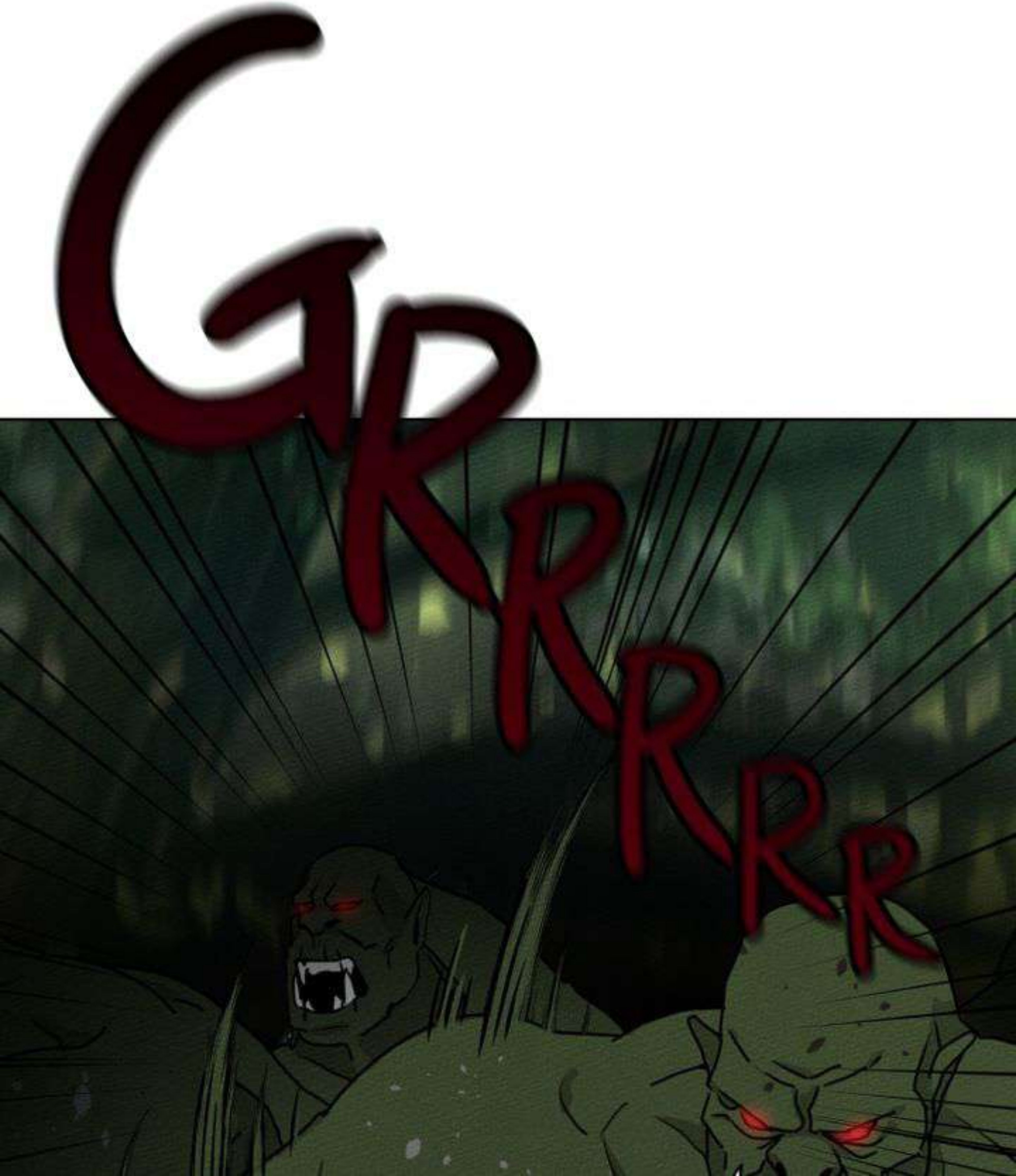

SIR! OGRES!

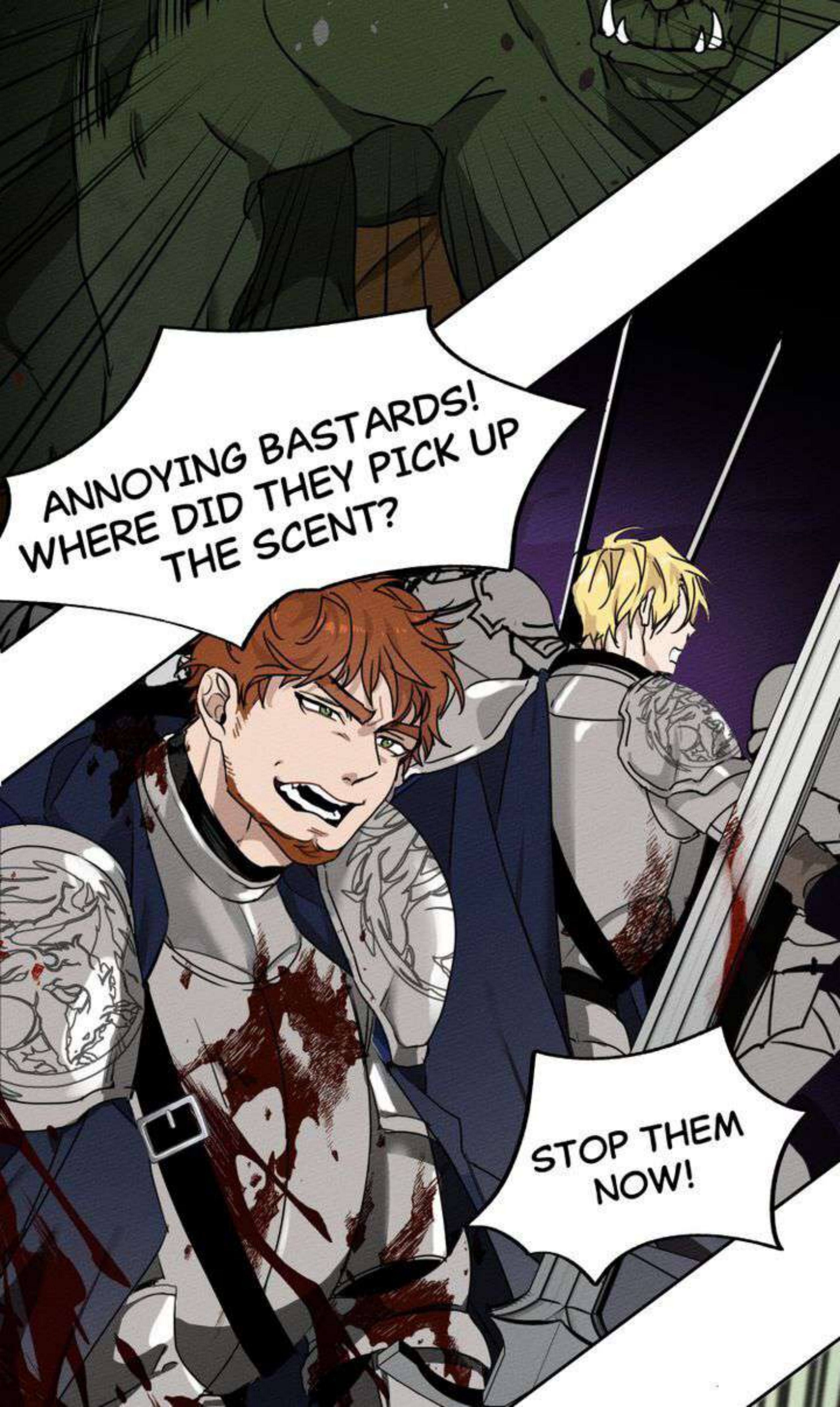

DAMN IT.
PUT A SHIELD ON
THE CARRIAGE FIRST!

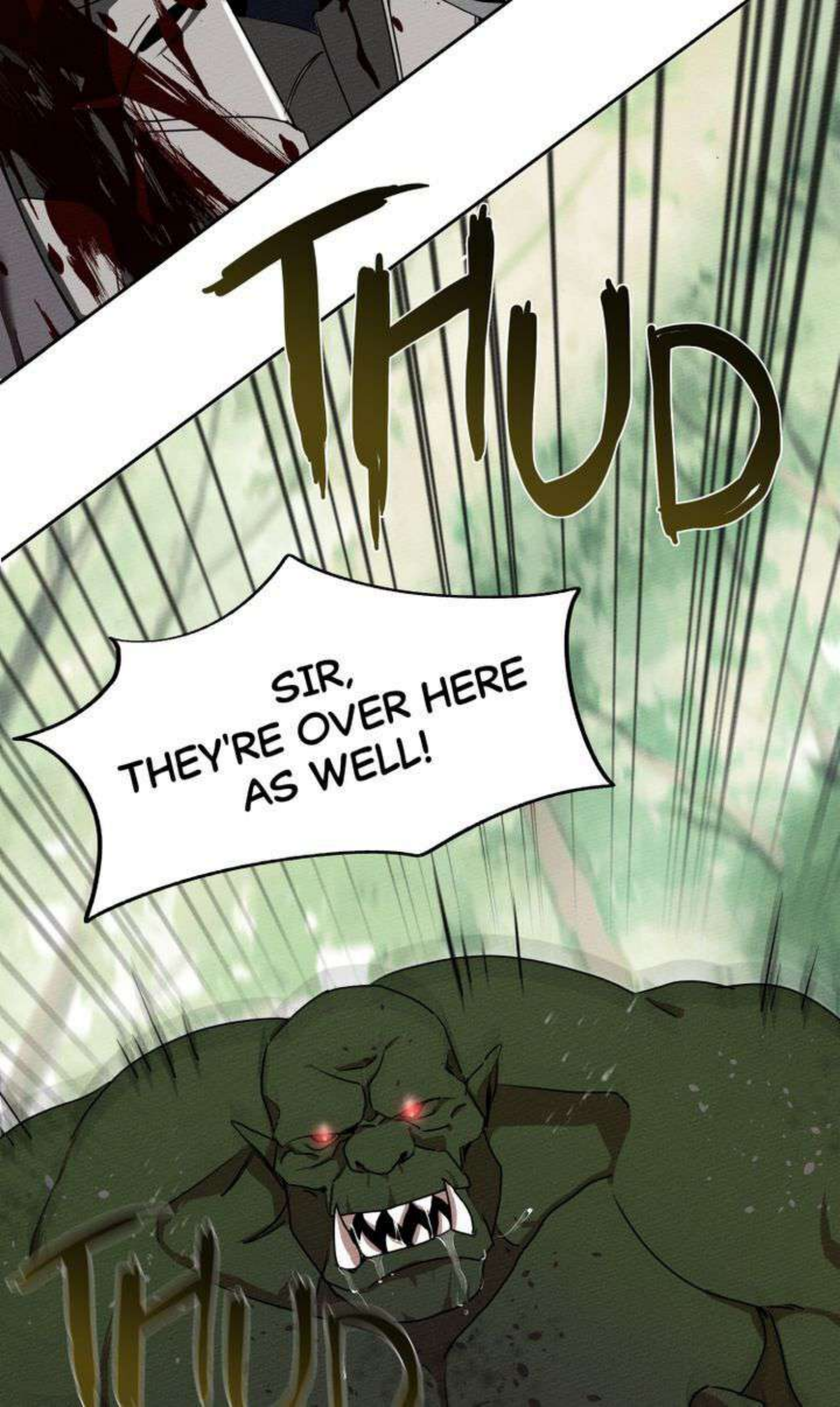
WHATEVER
HAPPENS,


DO NOT COME OUT!
BURST


THUD
THUD
THUD
W-WHAT DO I DO?
I'M SO SCARED. I'M SO SCARED.
TREMBLE

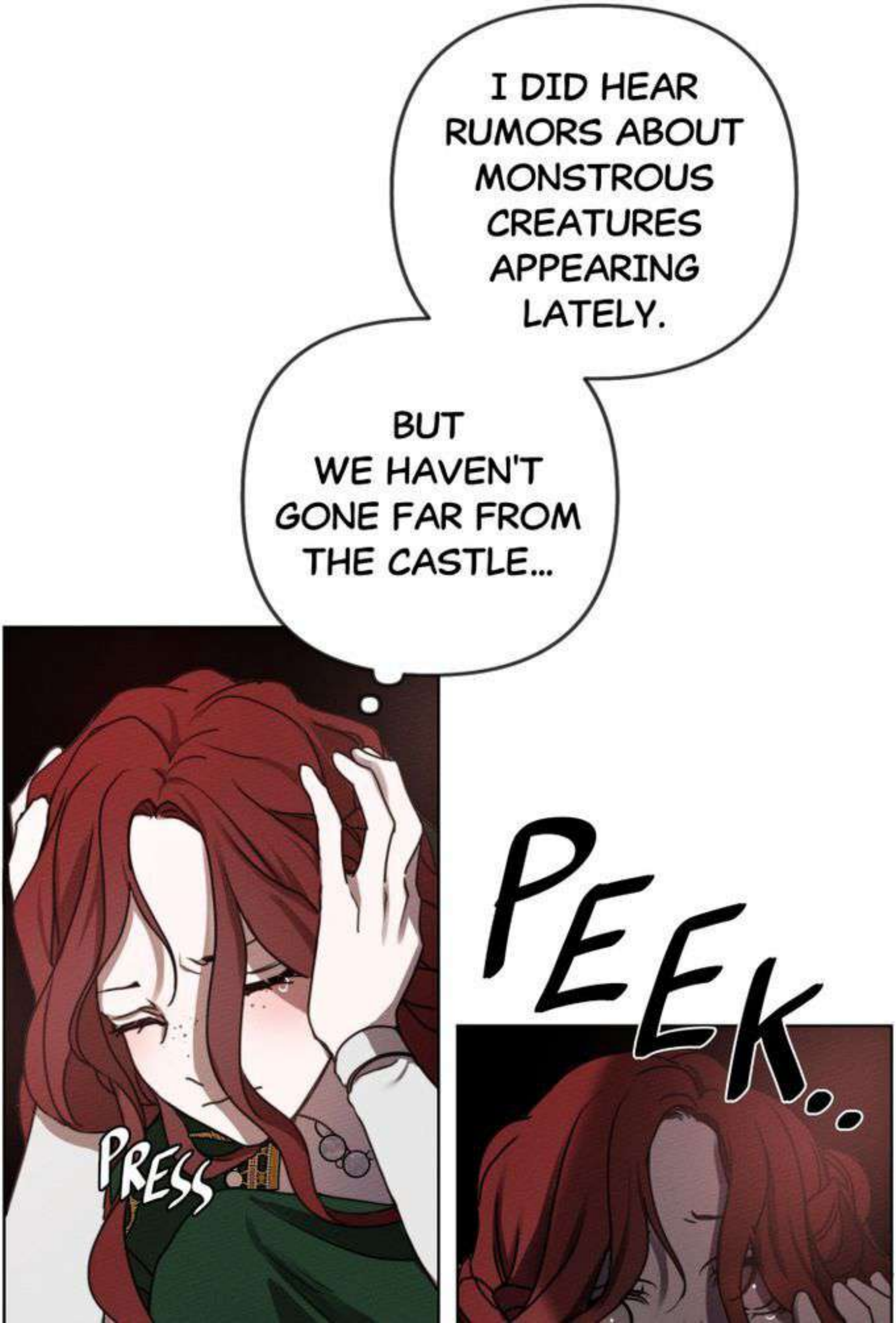

GRRRRR

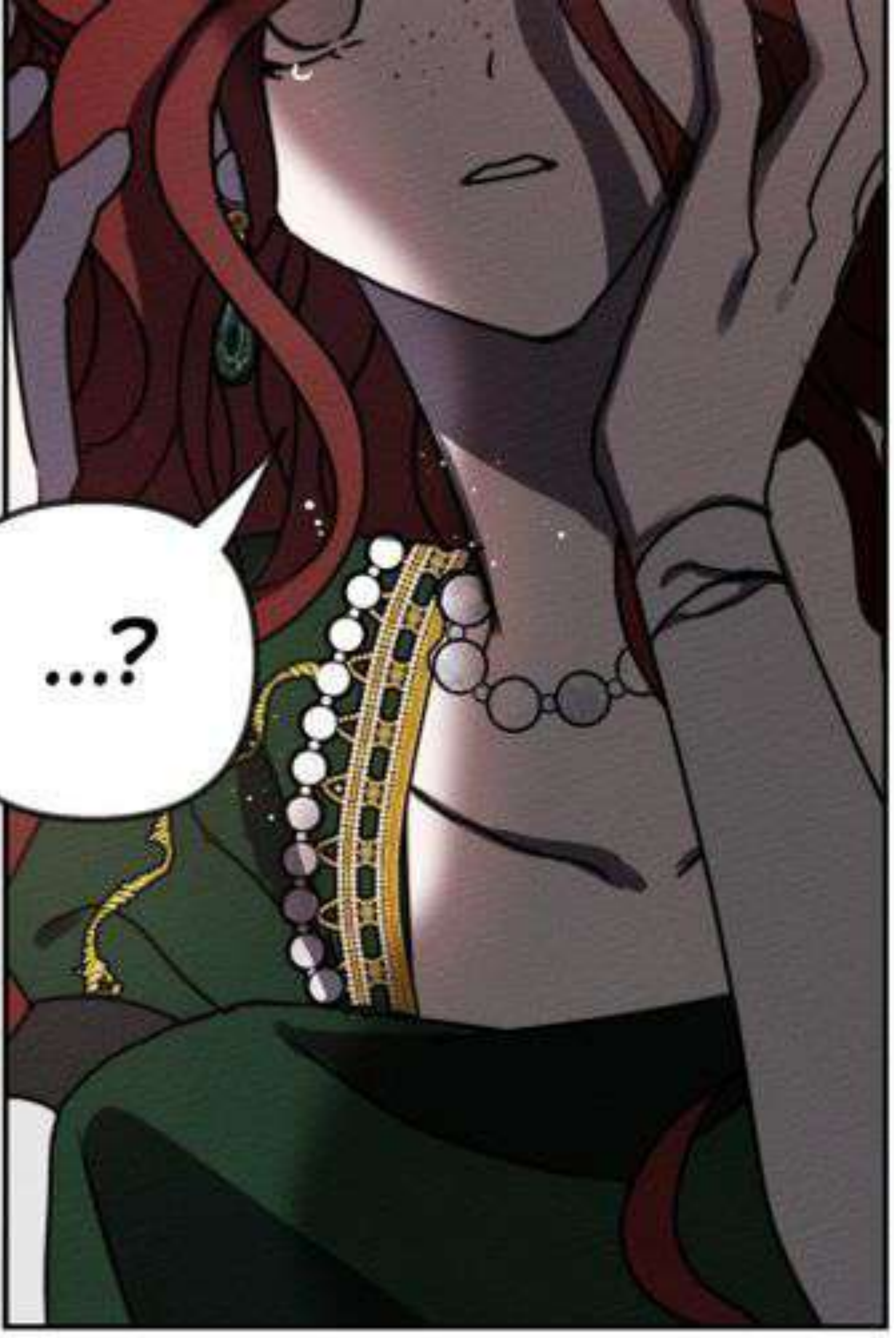

ANNOYING BASTARDS! WHERE DID THEY PICK UP THE SCENT?
STOP THEM NOW!

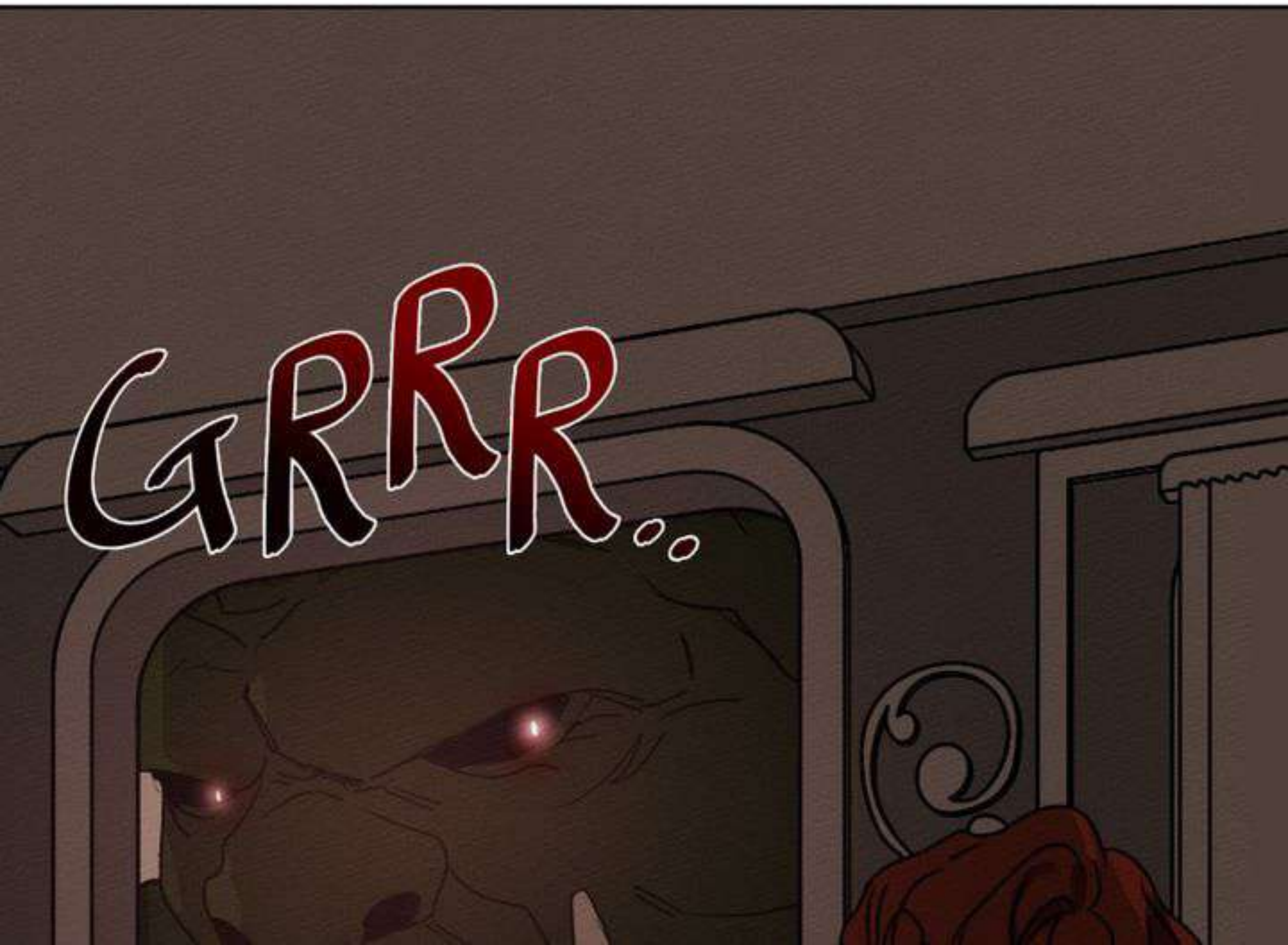

THUD
SIR, THEY'RE OVER HERE AS WELL!
THUD

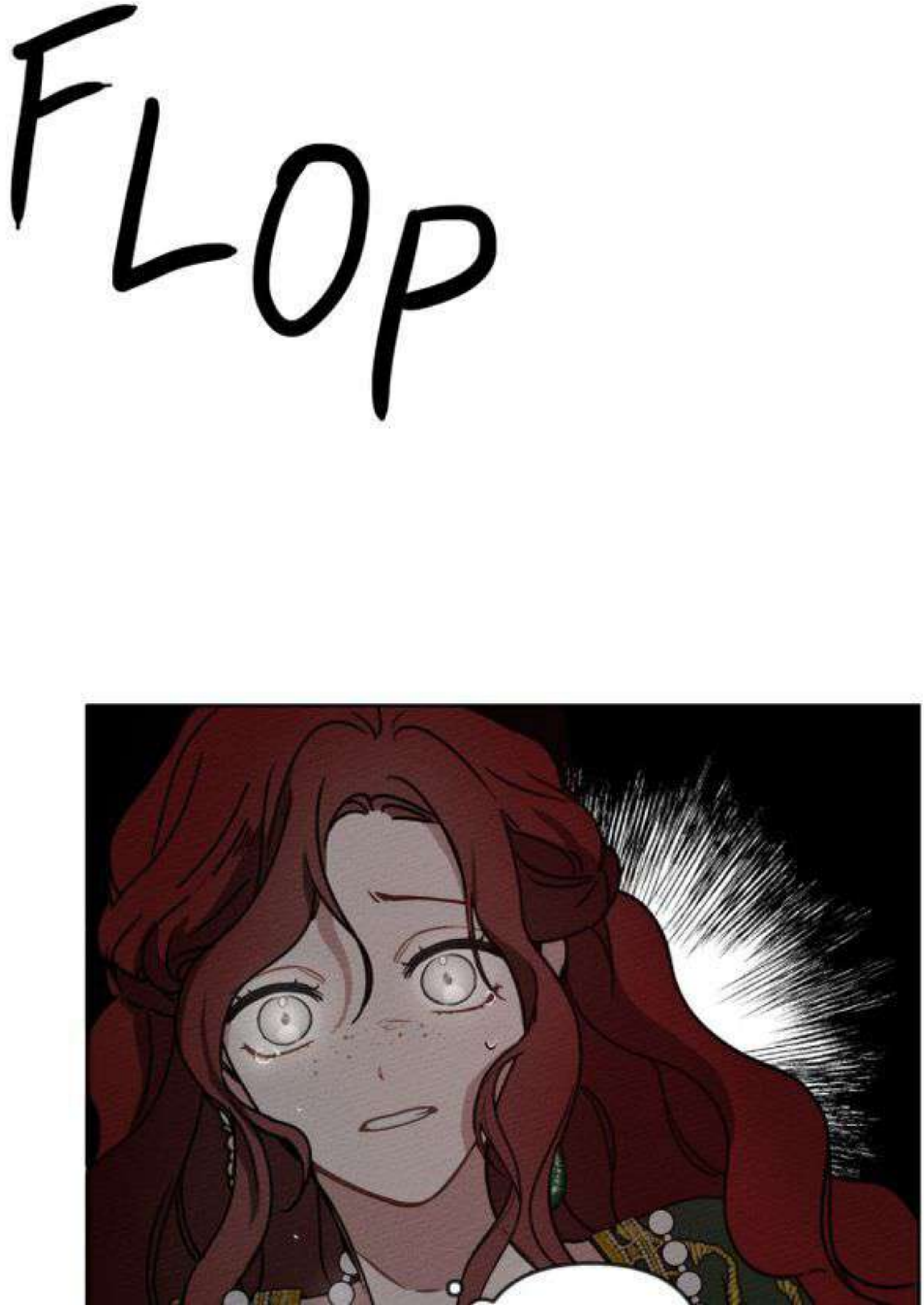
THUD
THUD

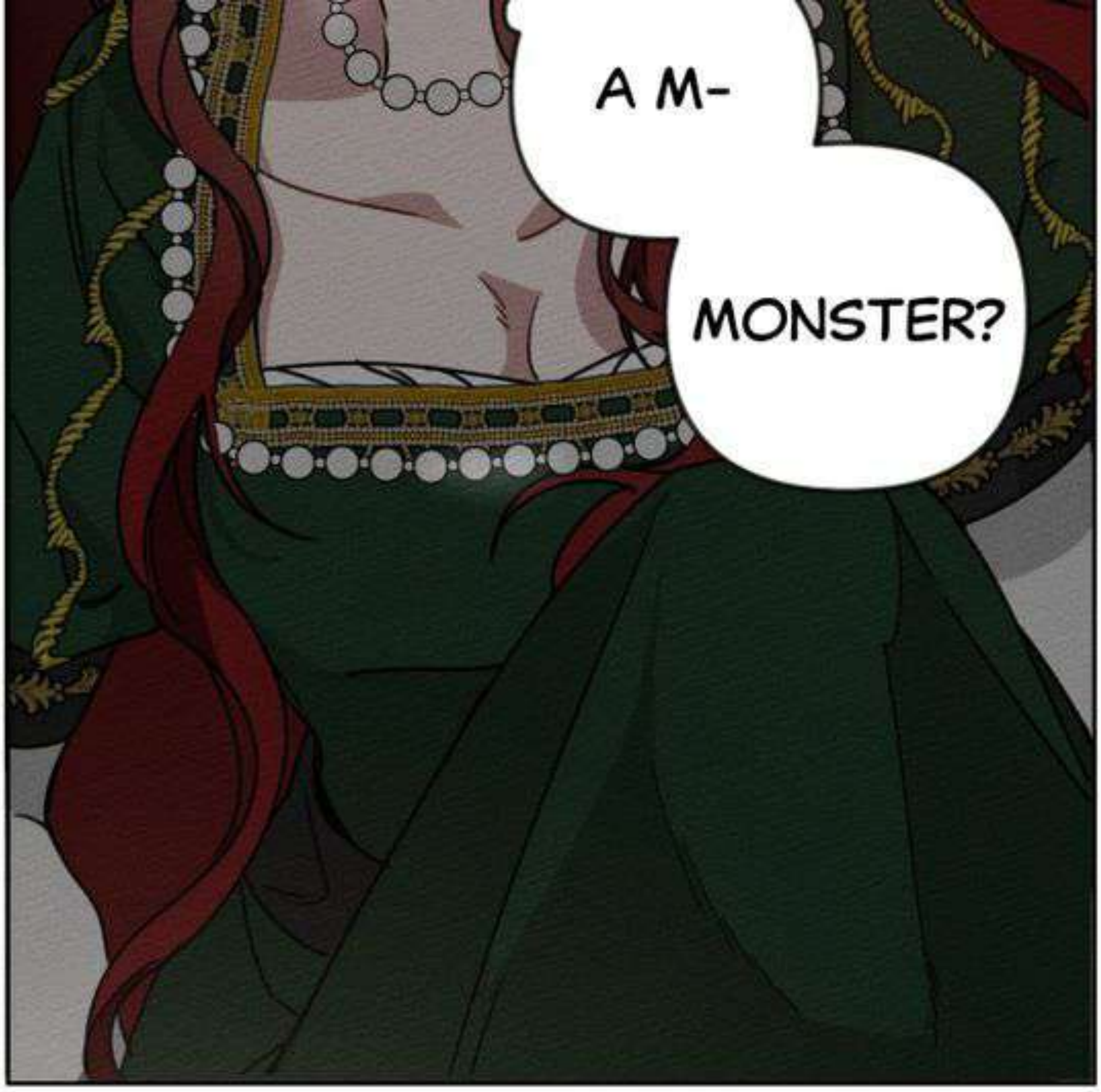
SWOOSH

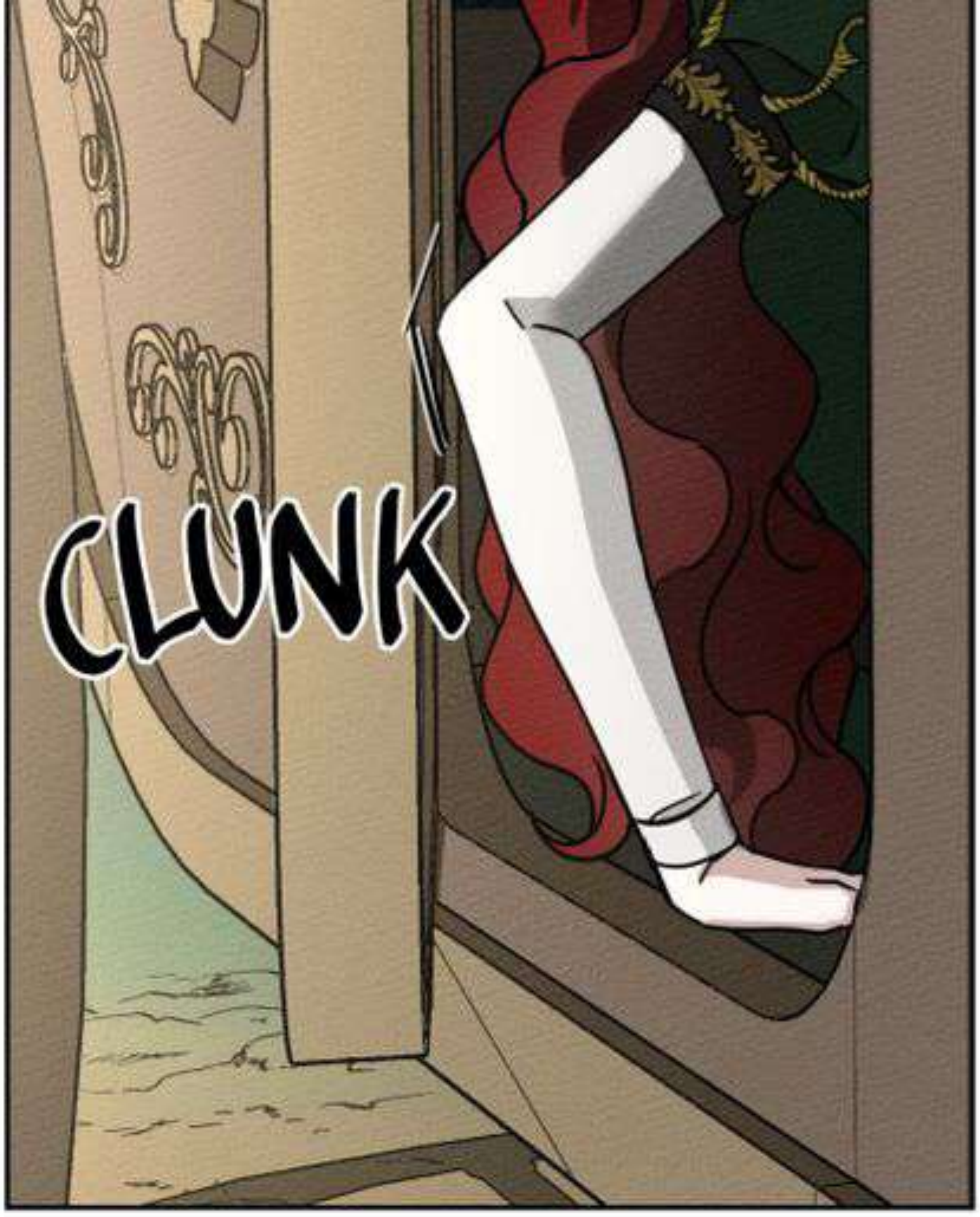

I DID HEAR RUMORS ABOUT MONSTROUS CREATURES APPEARING LATELY.
BUT WE HAVEN'T GONE FAR FROM THE CASTLE...
PRESS
PEEK..

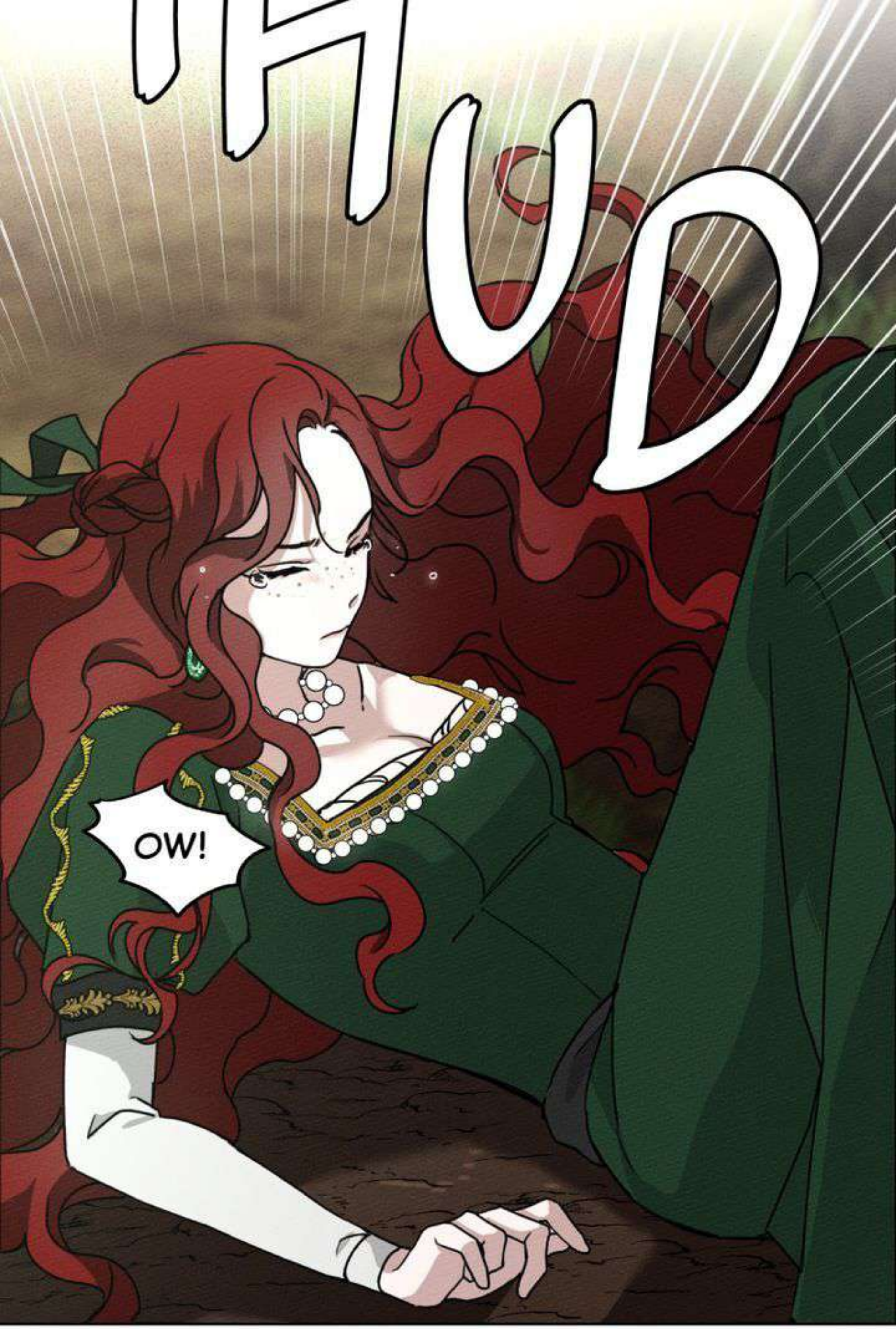

...?

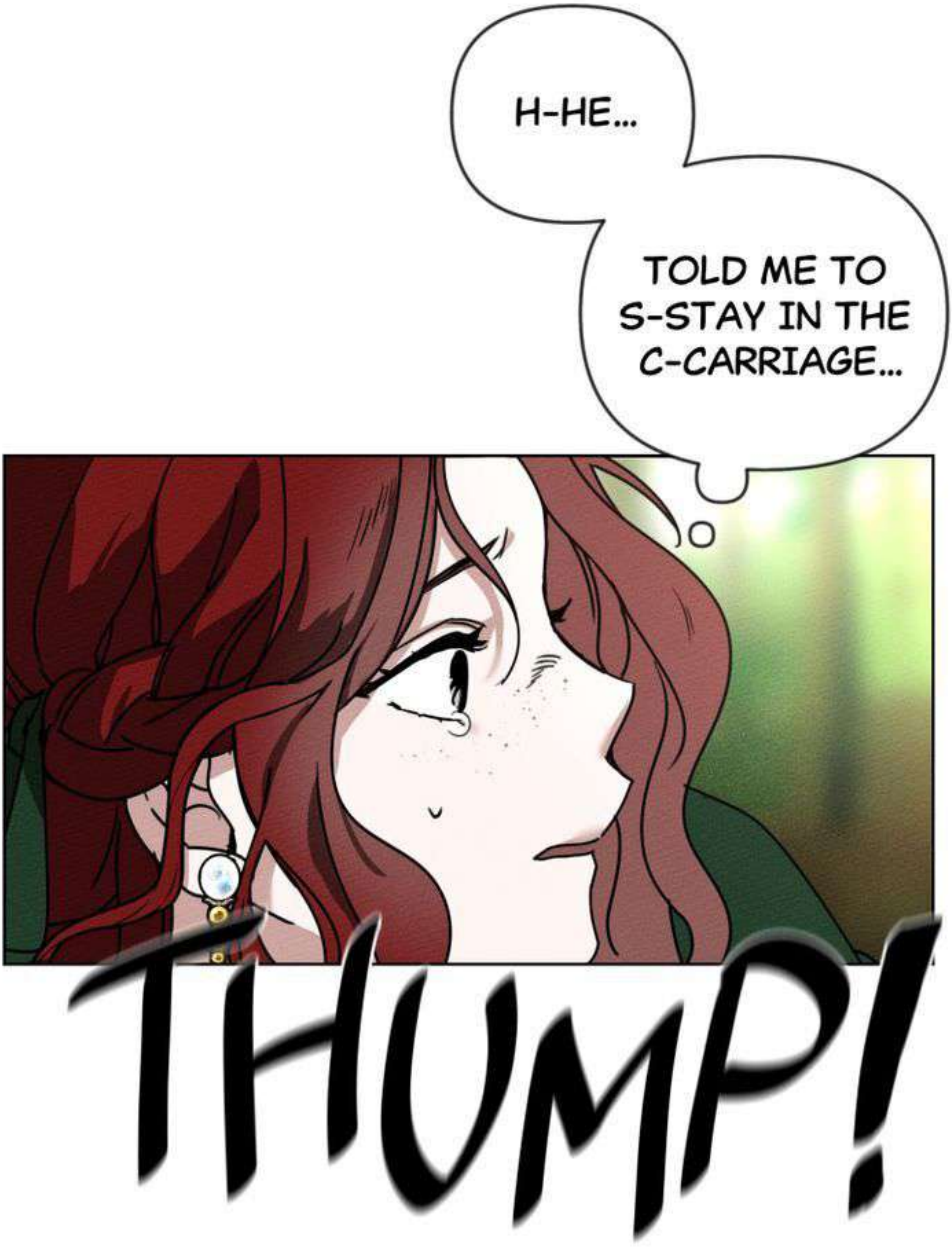

GRRR..

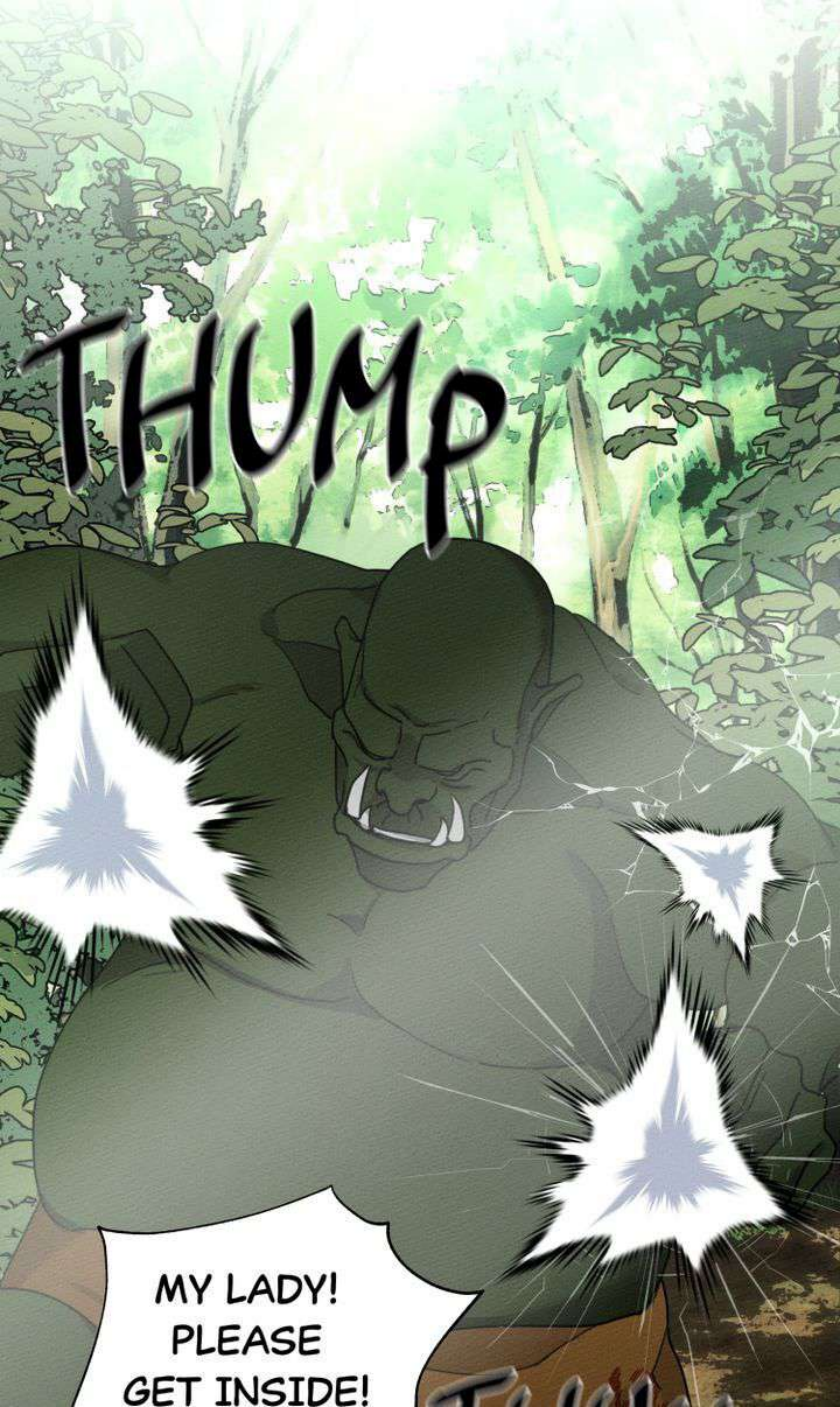

FLOP

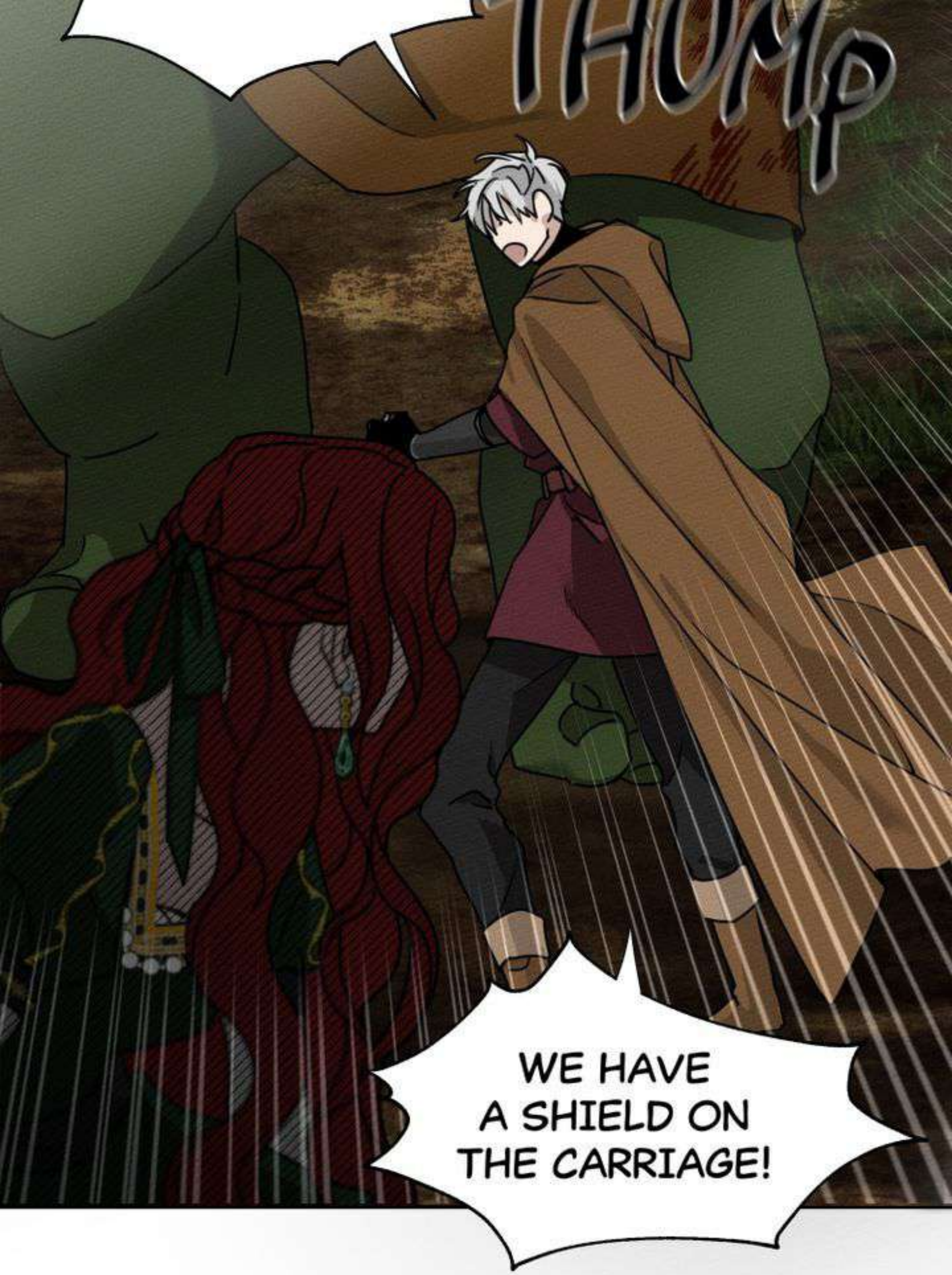

A M-
MONSTER?

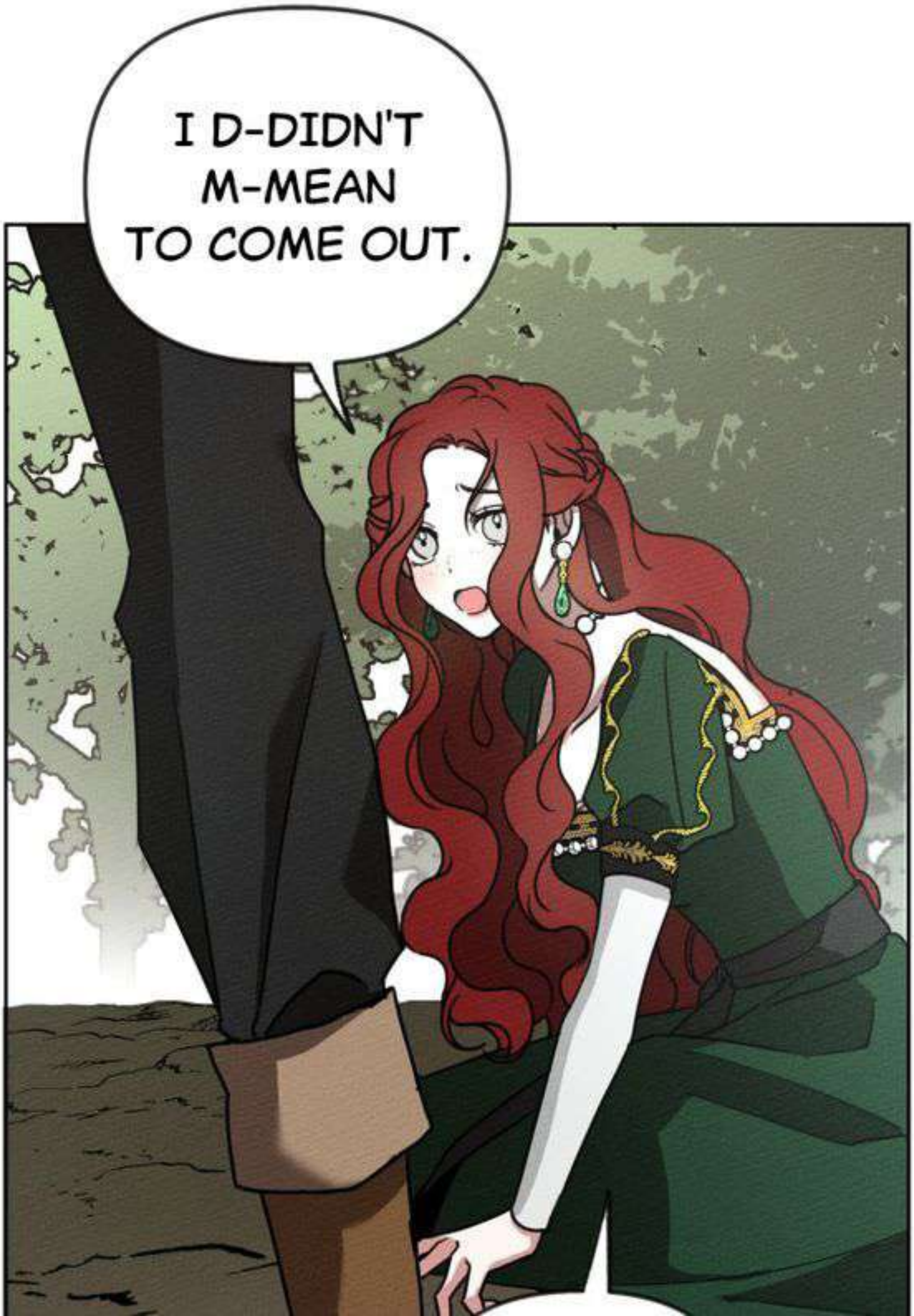

CLUNK

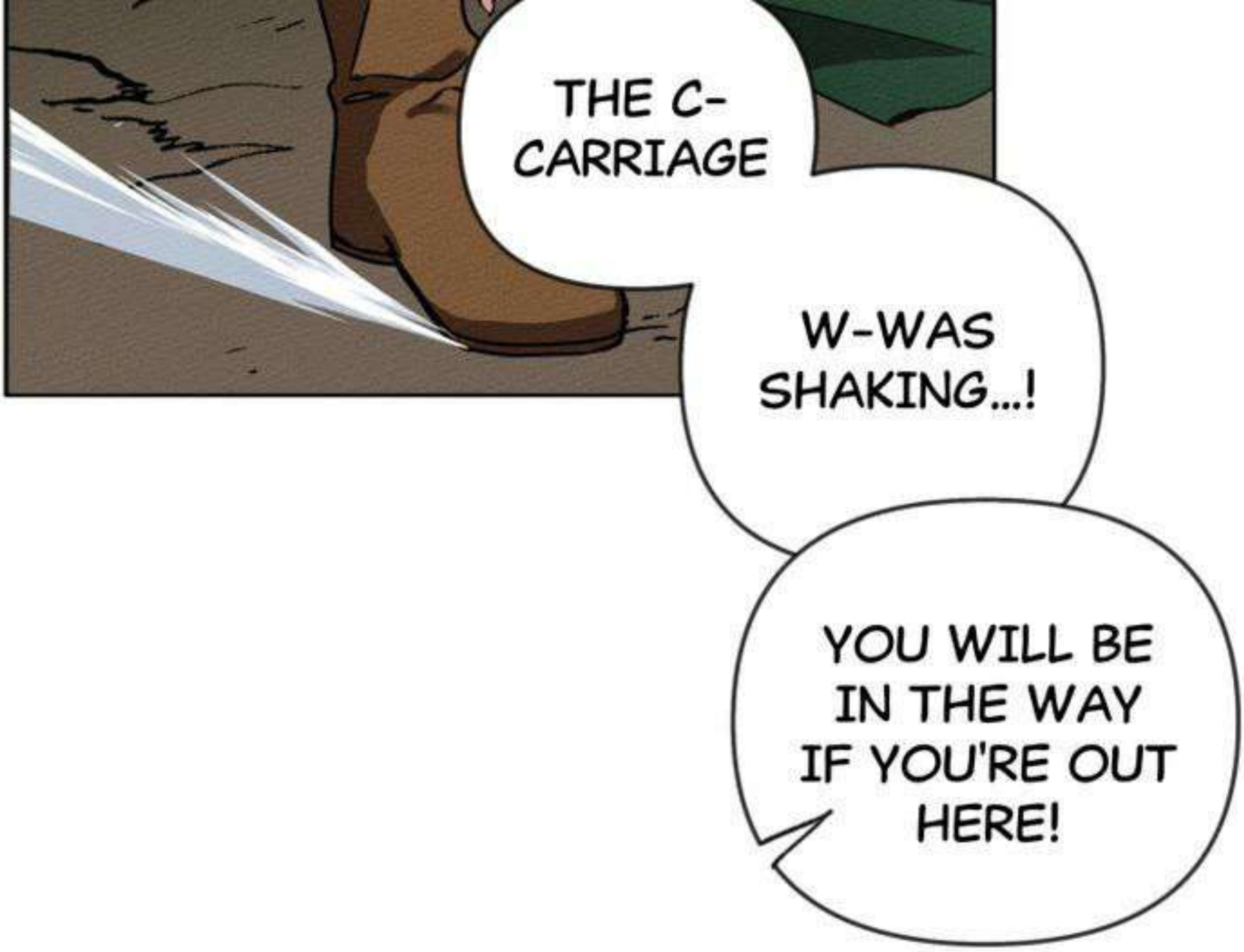

THUD
OW!

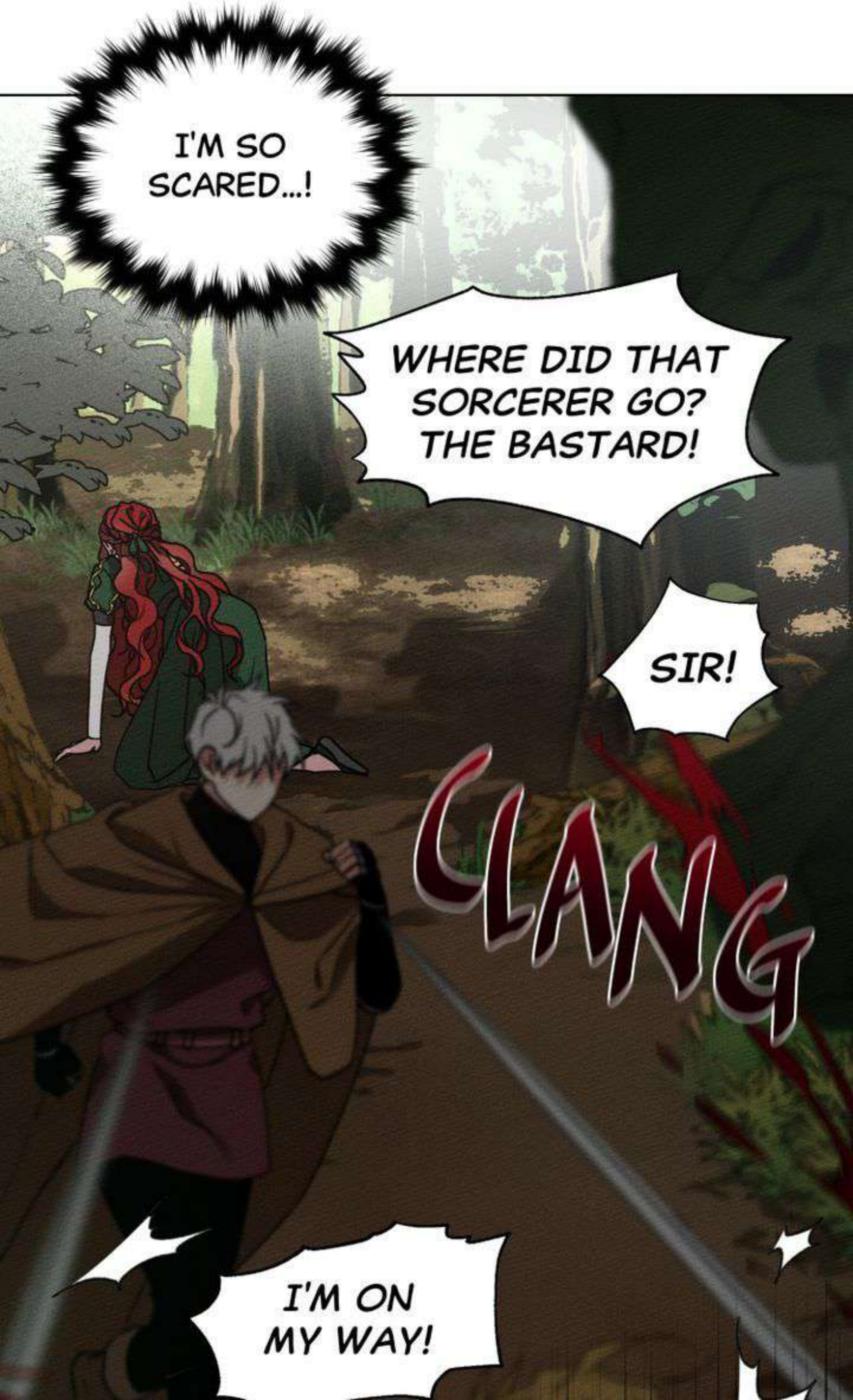

H-HE...
TOLD ME TO S-STAY IN THE C-CARRIAGE...
THUMP!

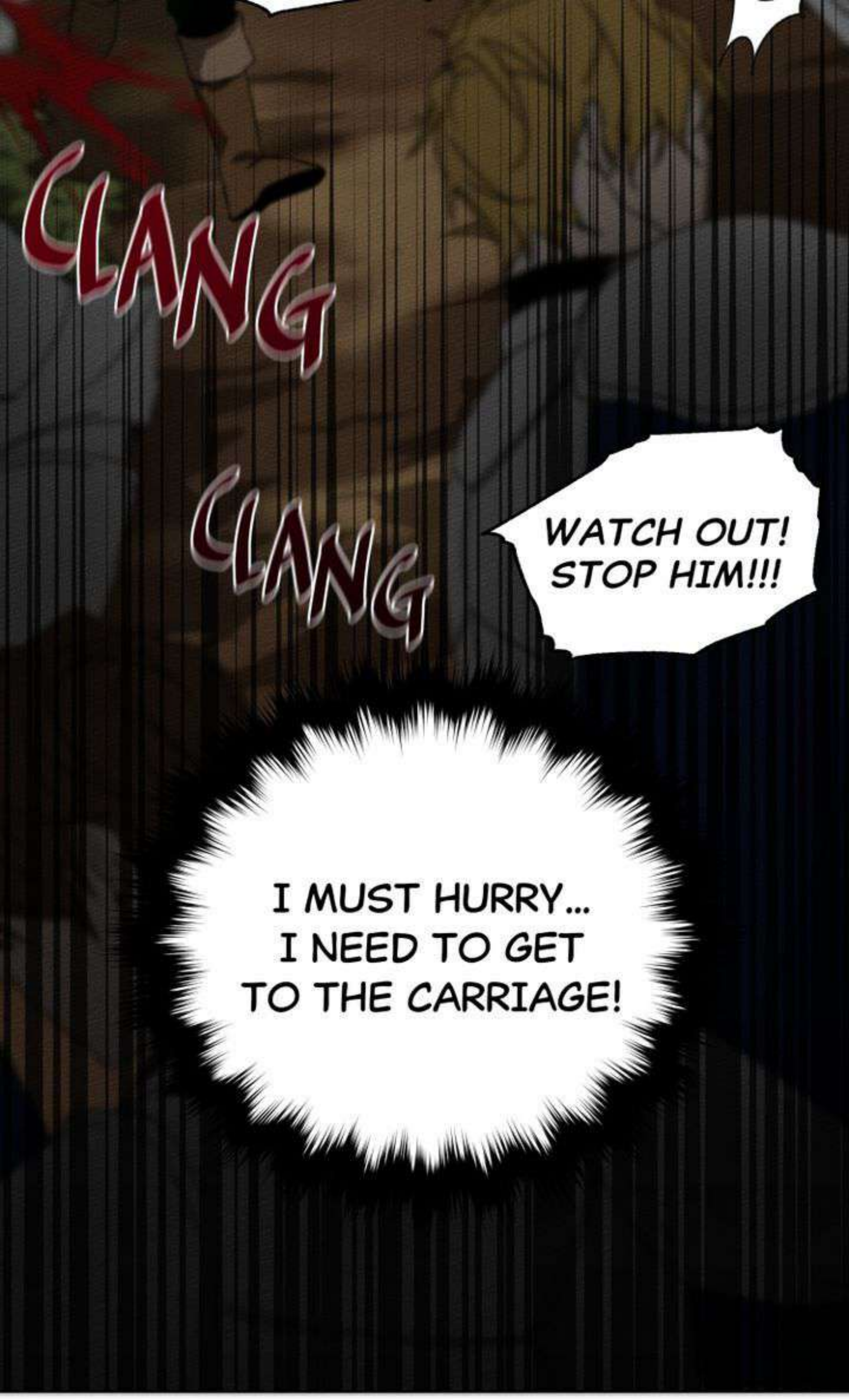

THUMP
MY LADY! PLEASE GET INSIDE!


THOMP
WE HAVE A SHIELD ON THE CARRIAGE!

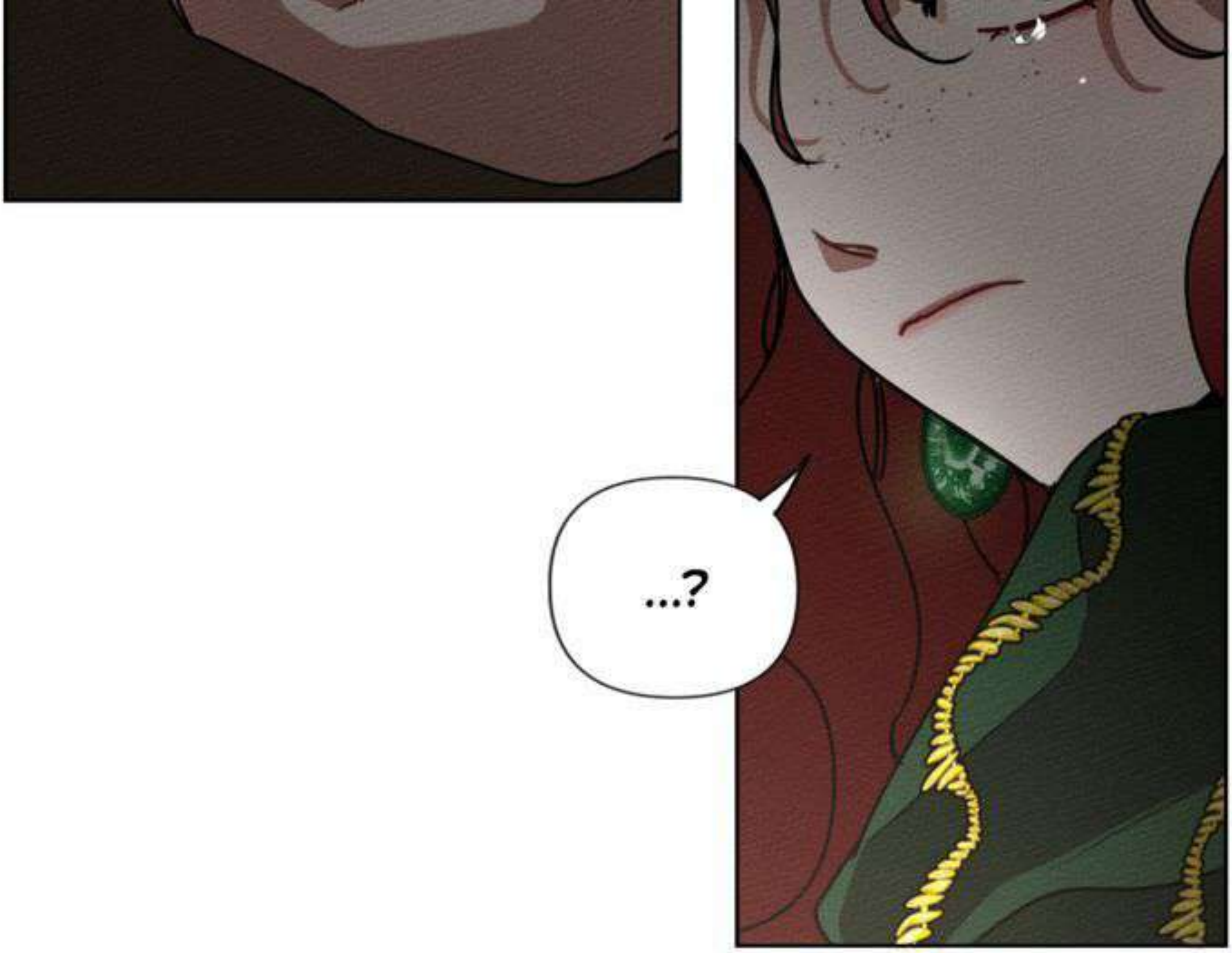

I D-DIDN'T M-MEAN TO COME OUT.


THE C-
CARRIAGE
W-WAS
SHAKING...!
YOU WILL BE
IN THE WAY
IF YOU'RE OUT
HERE!


I'M SO SCARED...!
WHERE DID THAT SORCERER GO? THE BASTARD!
SIR!
CLANG
I'M ON MY WAY!

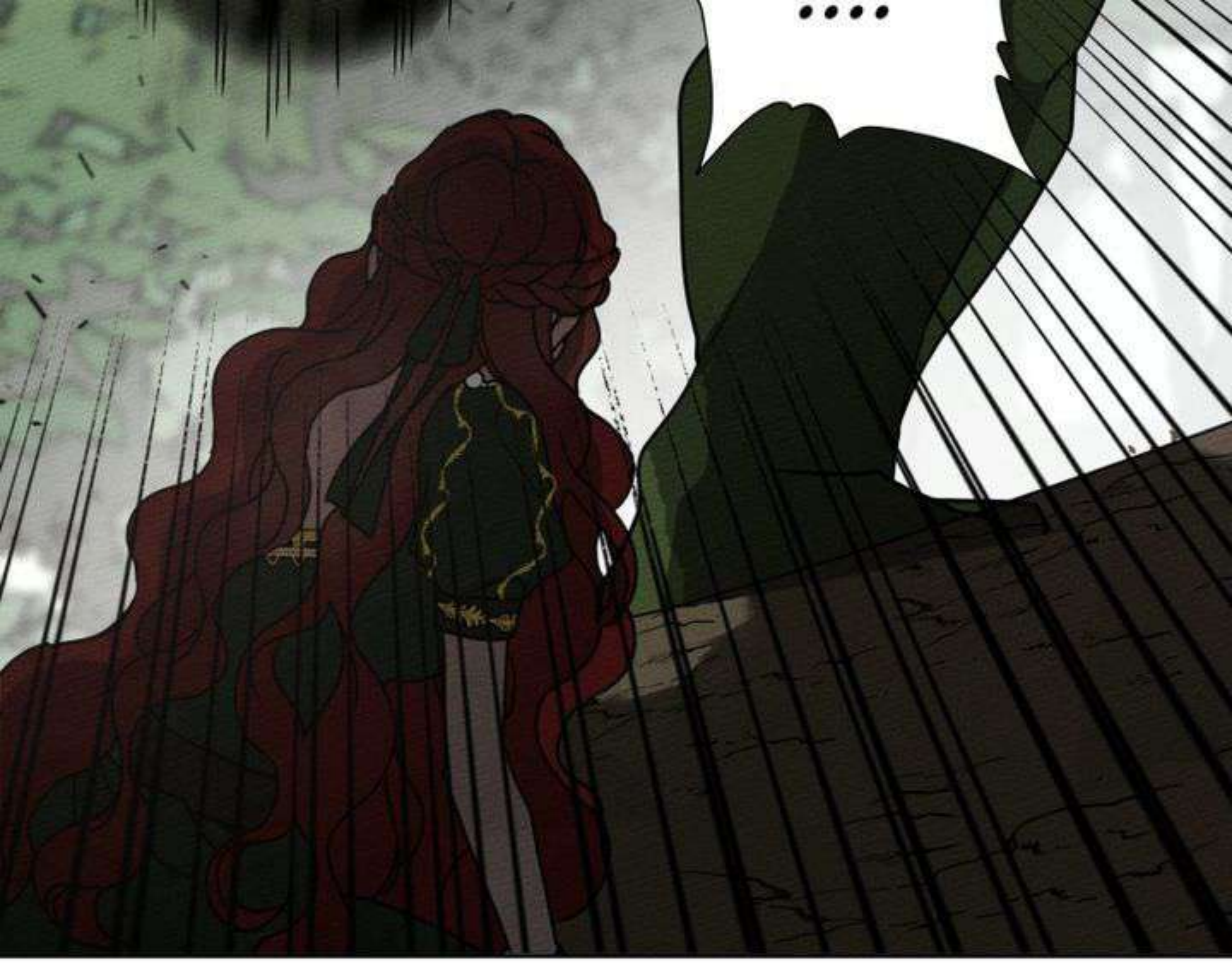

CLANG
CLANG
WATCH OUT! STOP HIM!!!
I MUST HURRY... I NEED TO GET TO THE CARRIAGE!

LOOM
...?

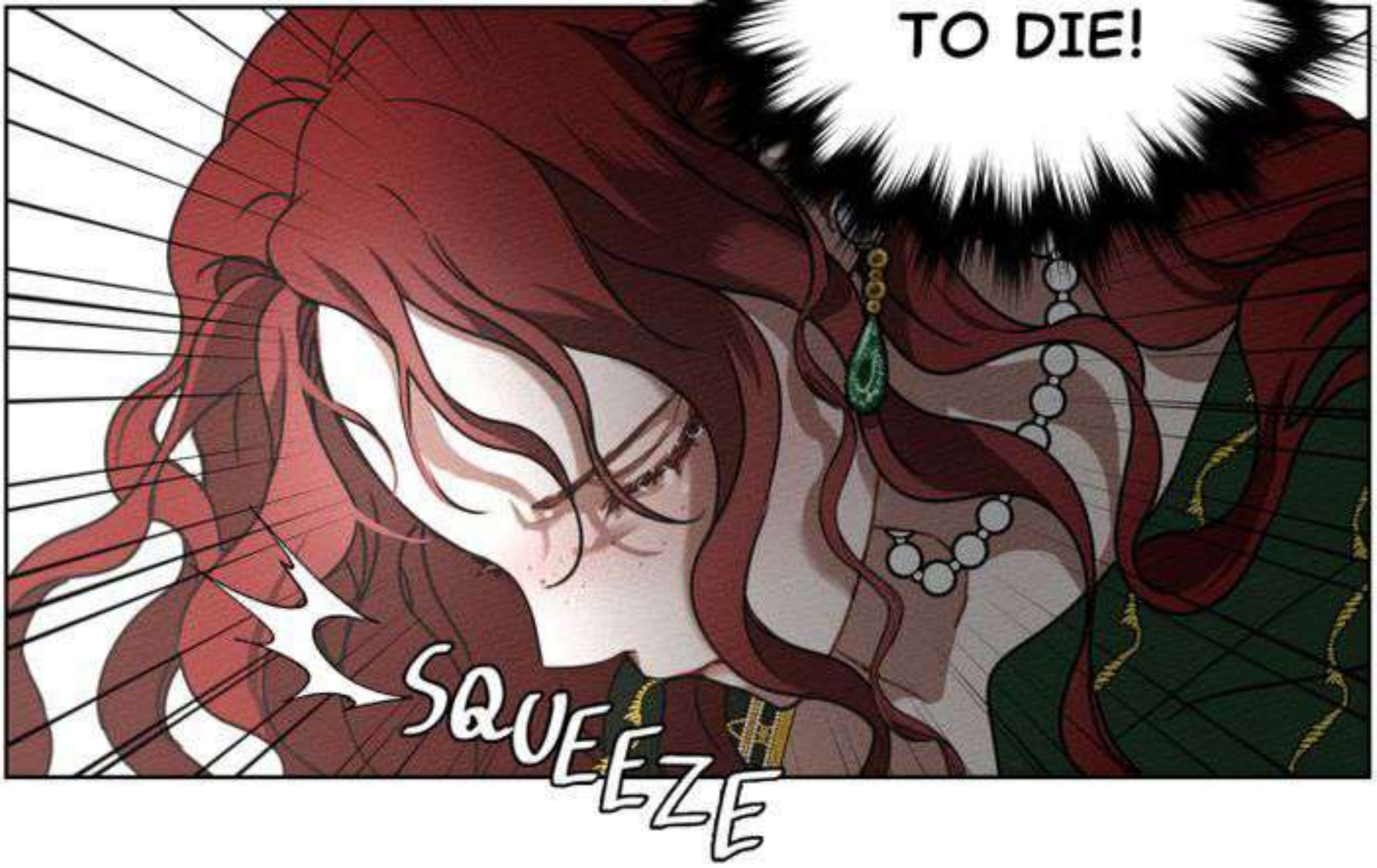

...?

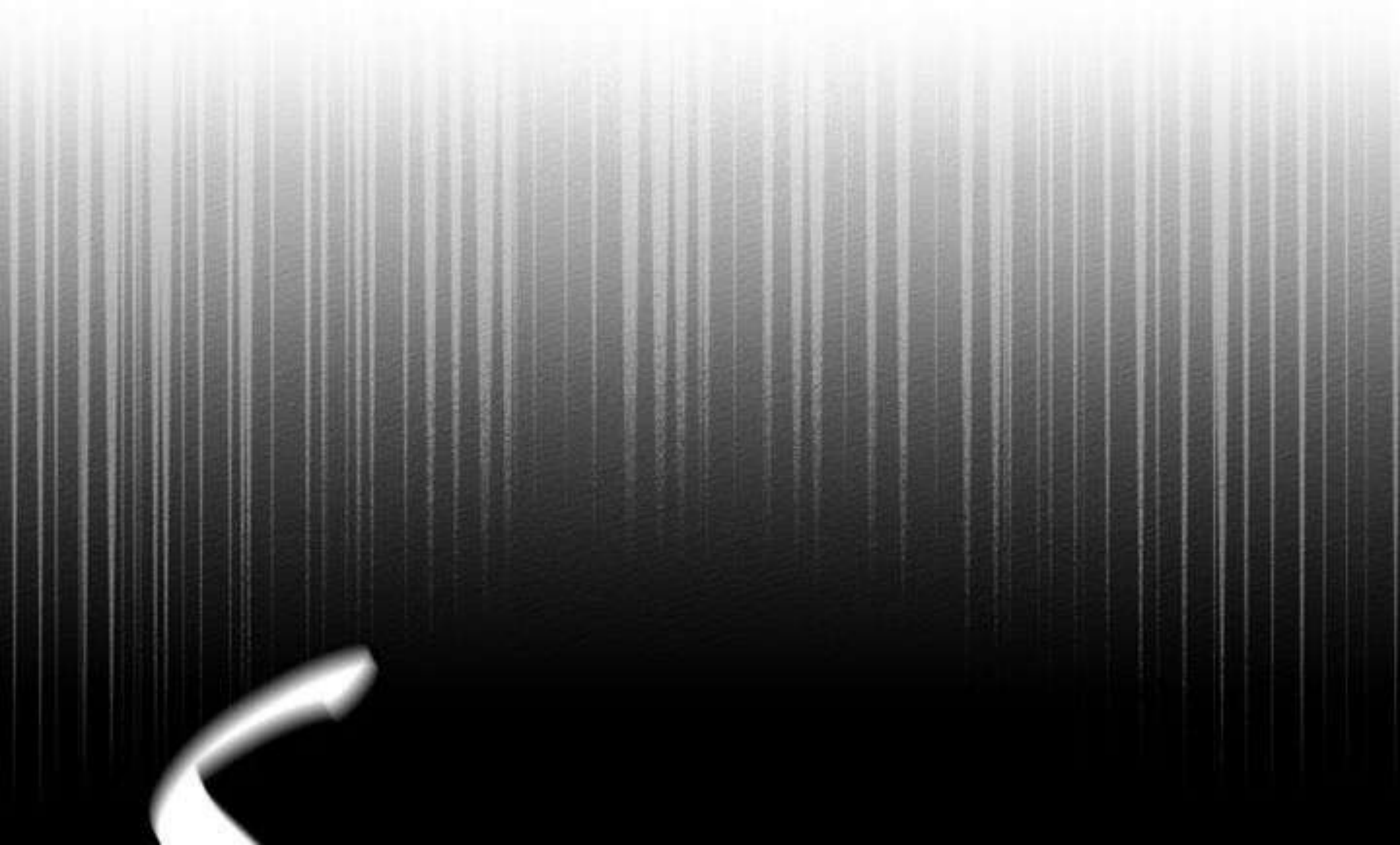
DU

DUN
////

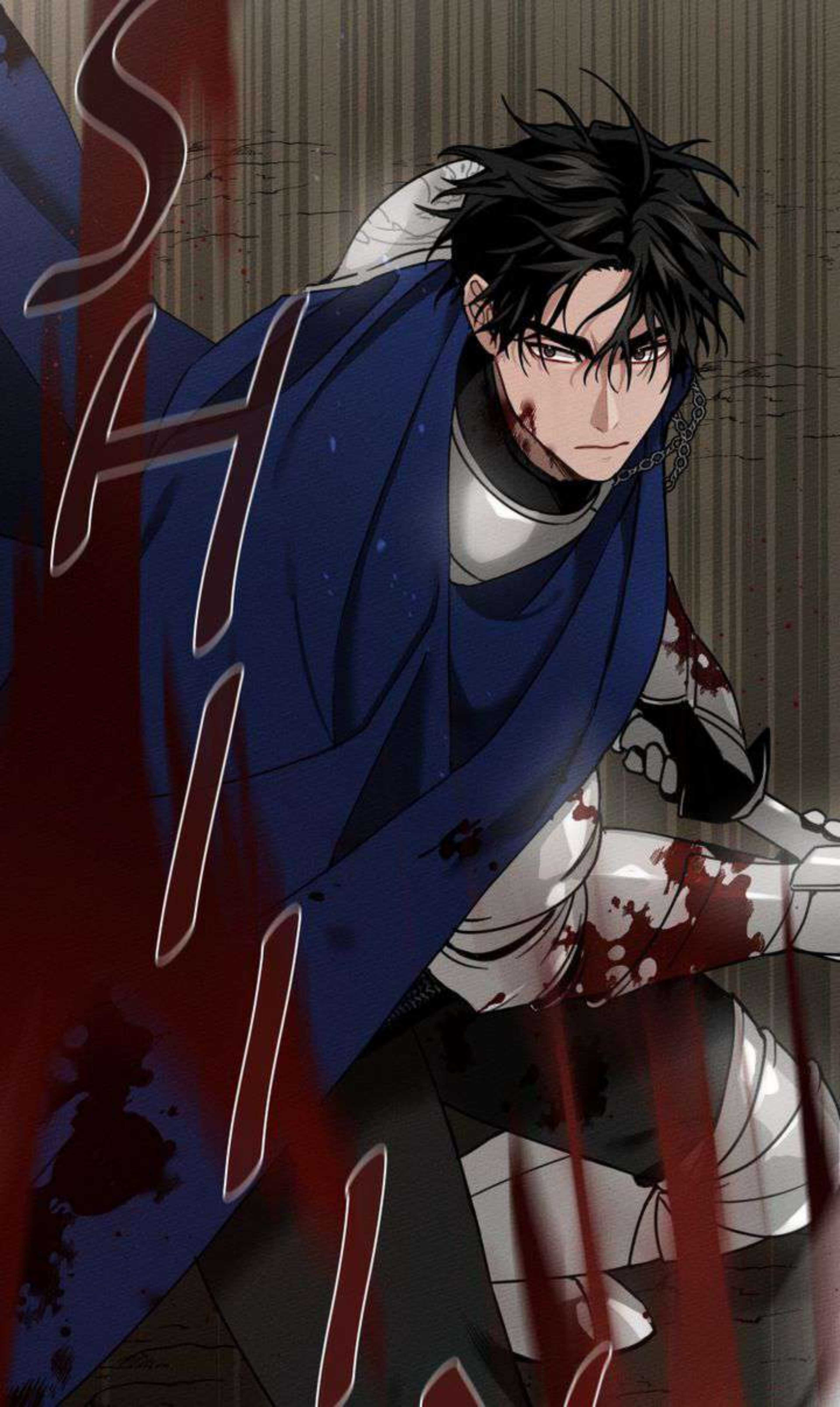

....

I'M... I'M GOING

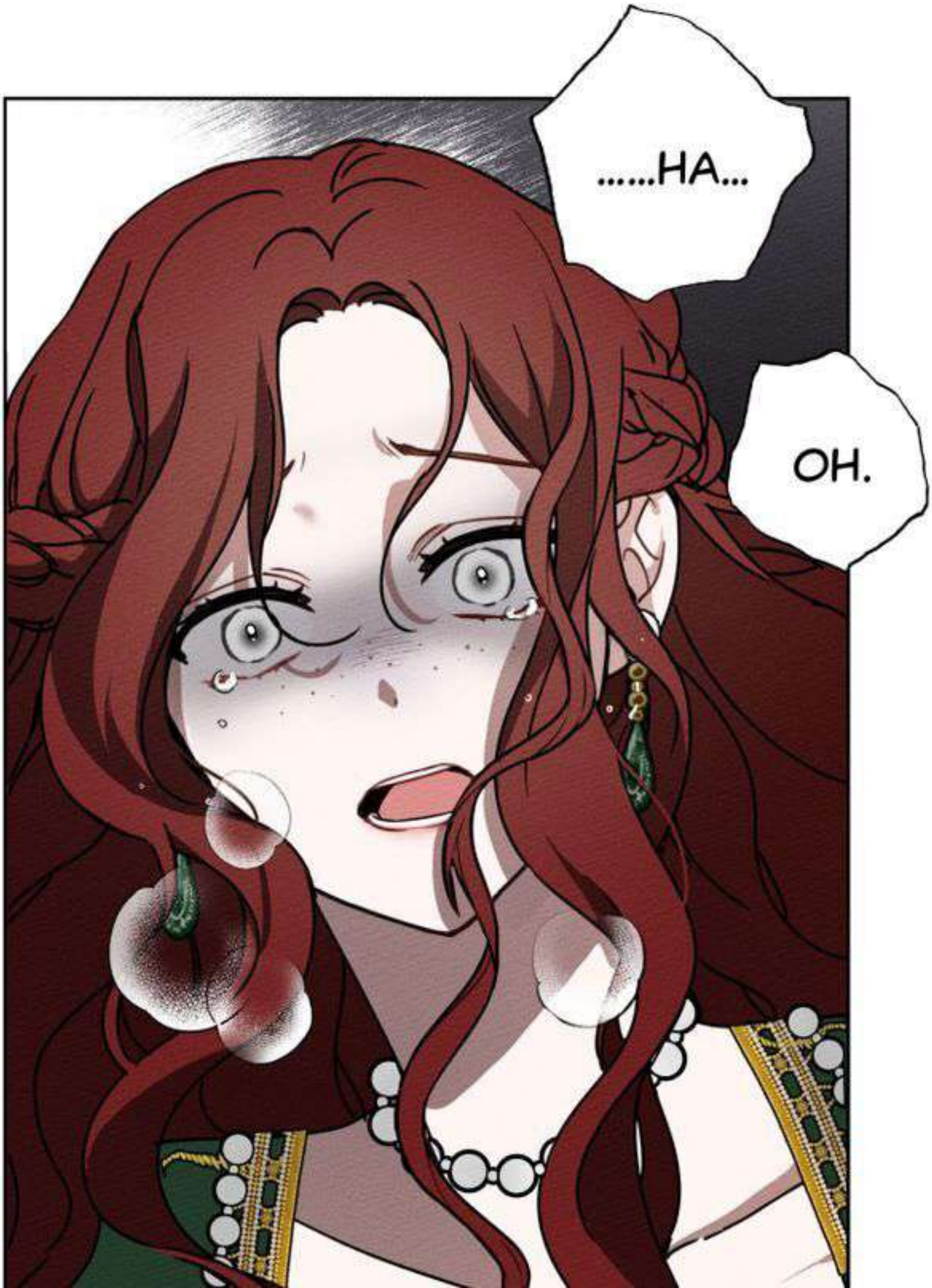

TO DIE!
SQUEEZE



SWOOSH


SHIIII

NCT


……HA…
OH.

TEETER

ASSISTANCE INTOL
K_Din
Yemin

PRODUCTION SUPPORT orangetrack

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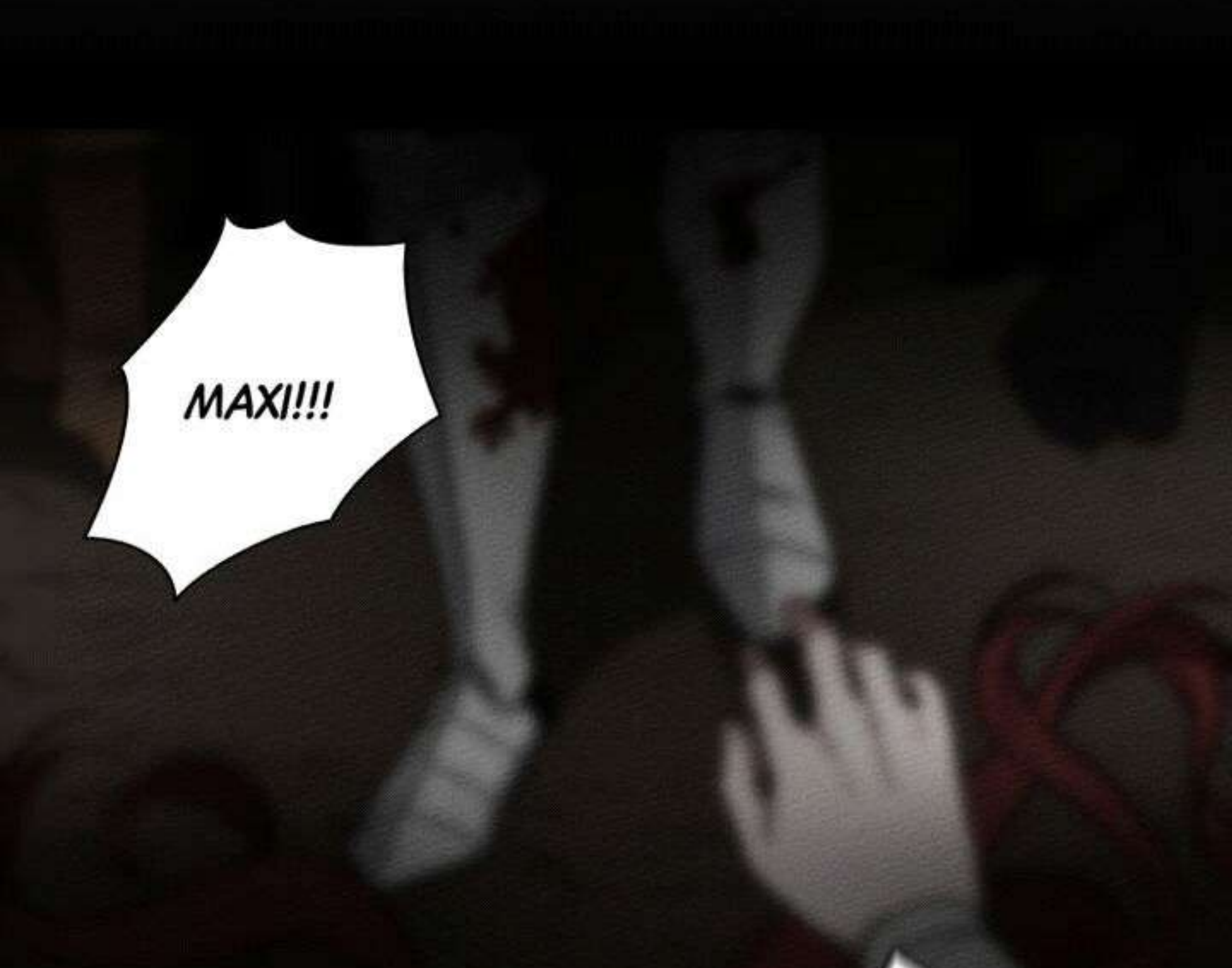
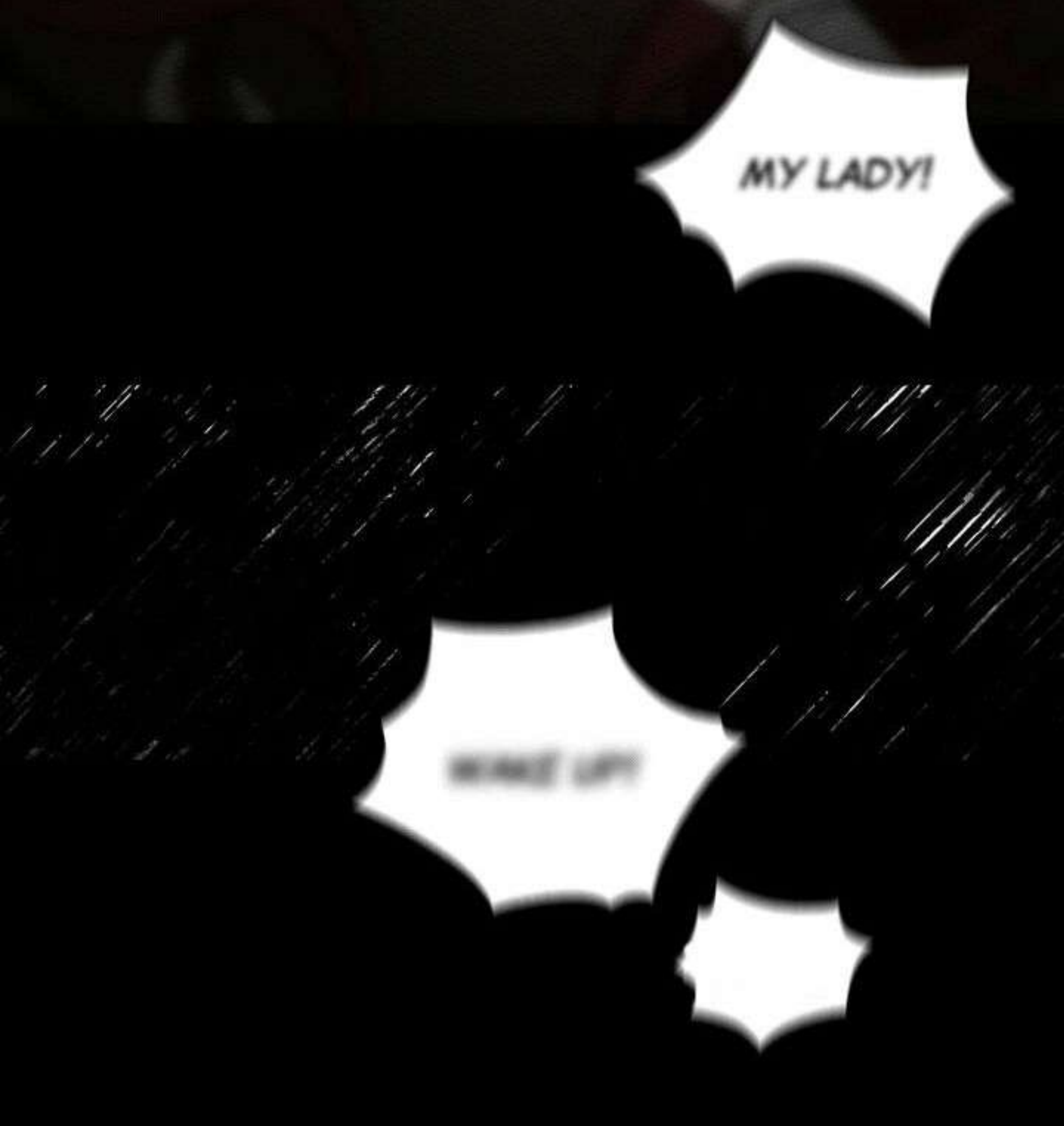
I'M...




MY LADY!
WAKE UP!

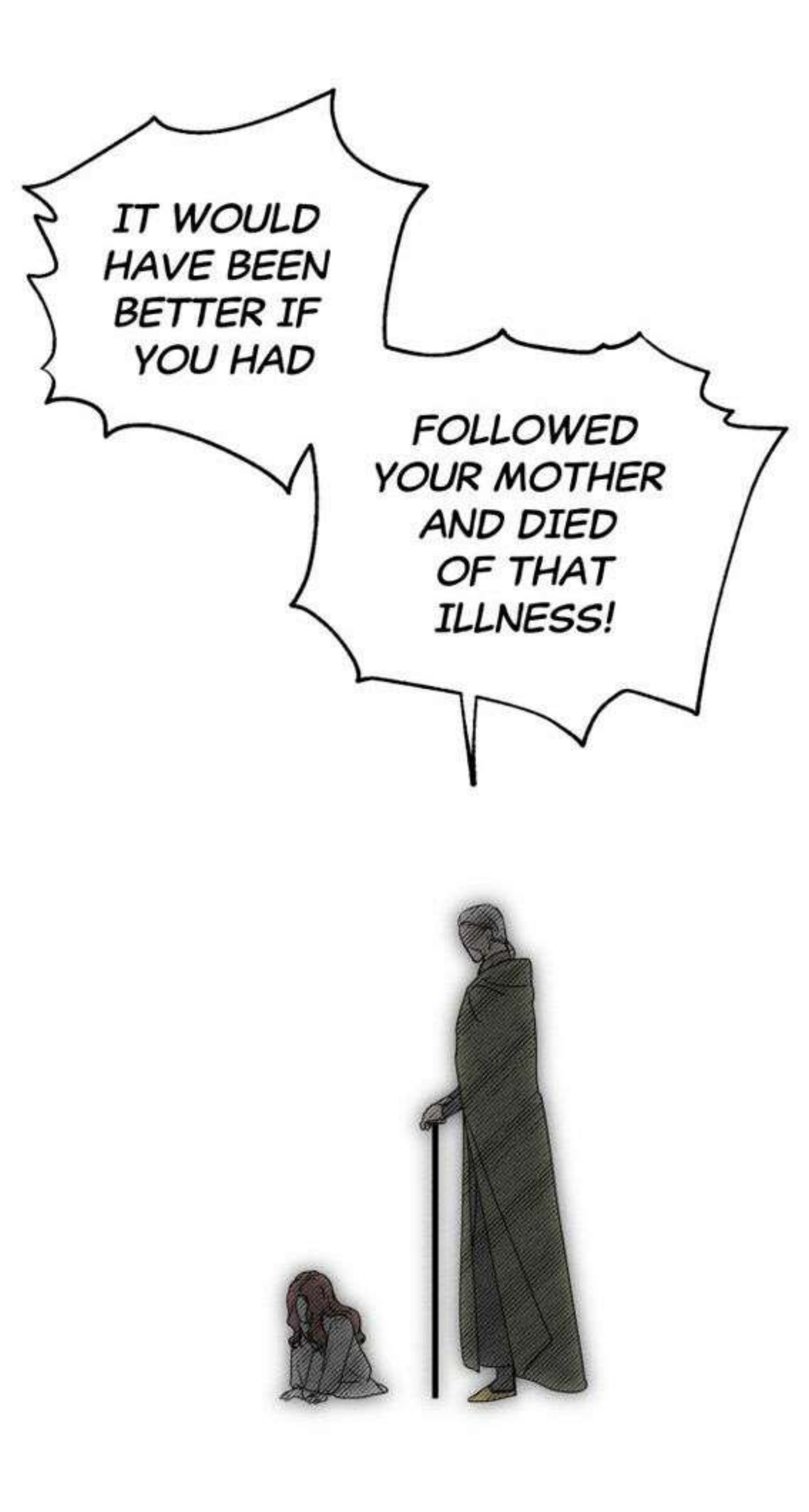
HAS MY PUNISHMENT COME?

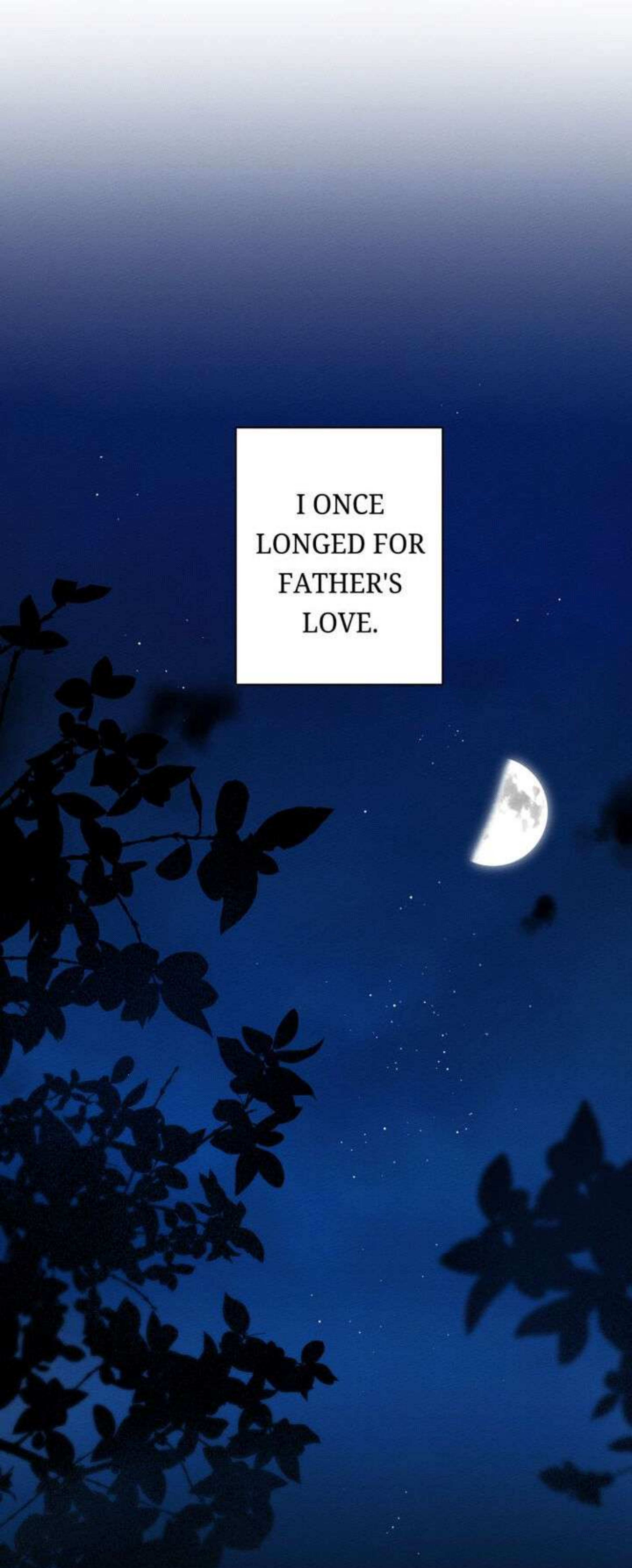
Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

4

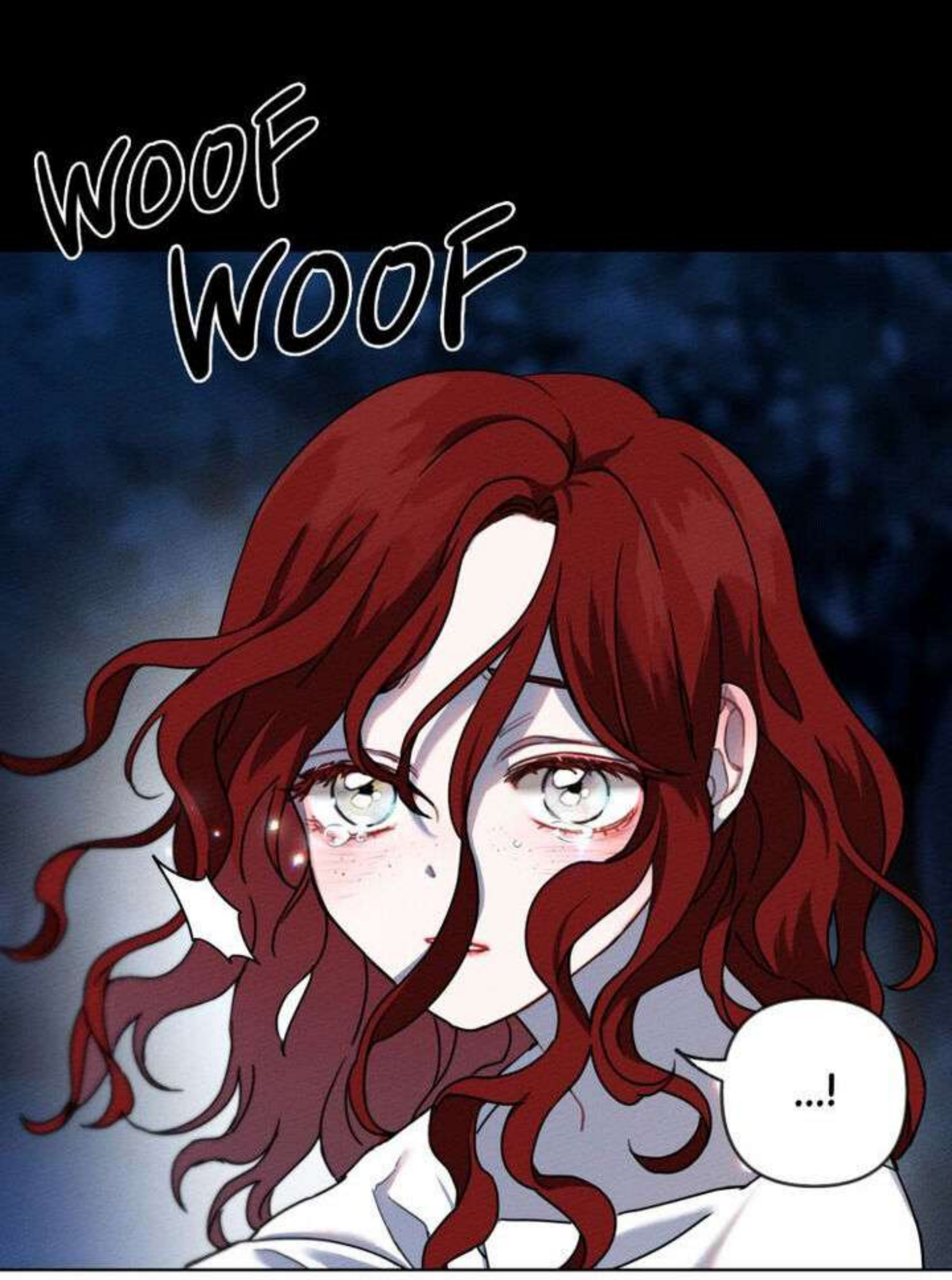
CRACK
YOU USELESS WENCH!
NOT ONLY A GIRL, BUT ONE WHO CAN'T SPEAK!
TREMBLE


IT WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER IF YOU HAD
FOLLOWED YOUR MOTHER AND DIED OF THAT ILLNESS!


I ONCE LONGED FOR FATHER'S LOVE.

THE FAMILY SHAME.
THE CROYSO STUMBLING BLOCK.
A WEAK, FOOLISH GIRL.
NO BETTER THAN A RODENT!

STOP!
PLEASE, STOP!
COWER
IT'S SO COLD.
I WISH SOMEONE
WOULD HOLD ME.
PLEASE,
CALL MY NAME...
ANYONE.
I BELIEVED
THAT
IF I TRIED,
AND OBEYED
FATHER...


WOOF
WOOF
...!

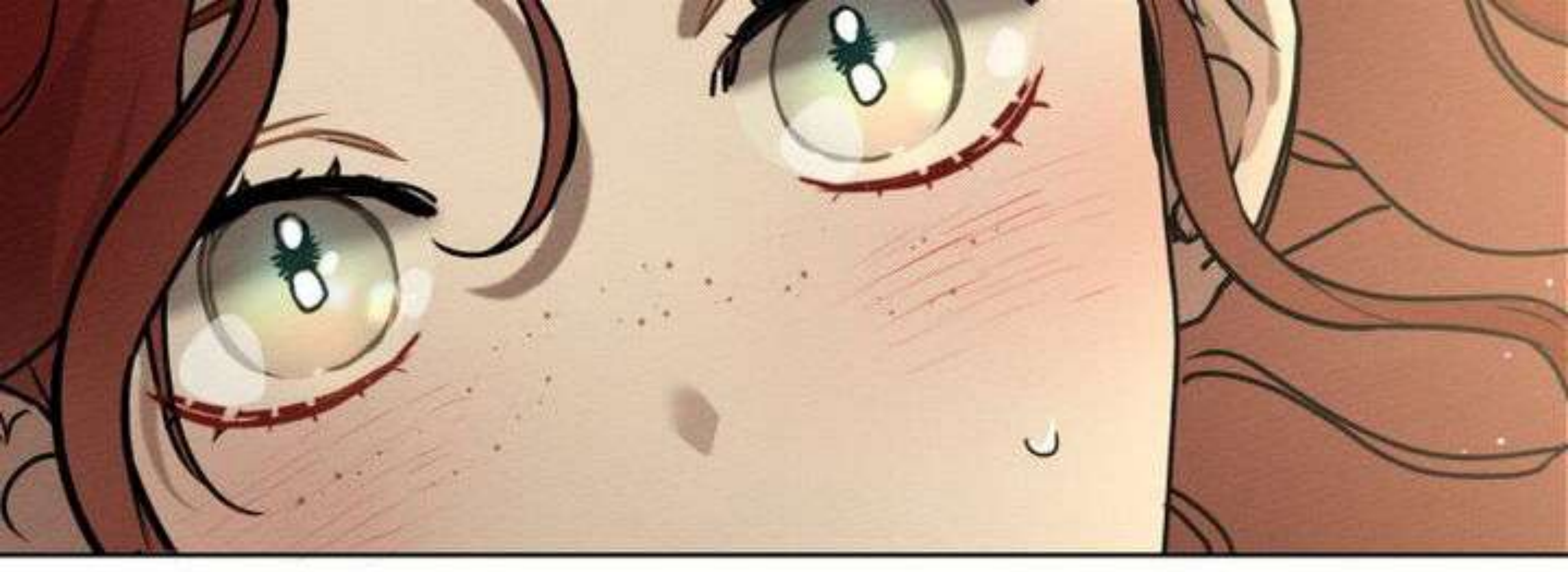
...ONE DAY, HE WOULD COME TO LOVE ME.
JUST AS HE LOVES THE BEAUTIFUL AND BRIGHT ROSETTA.

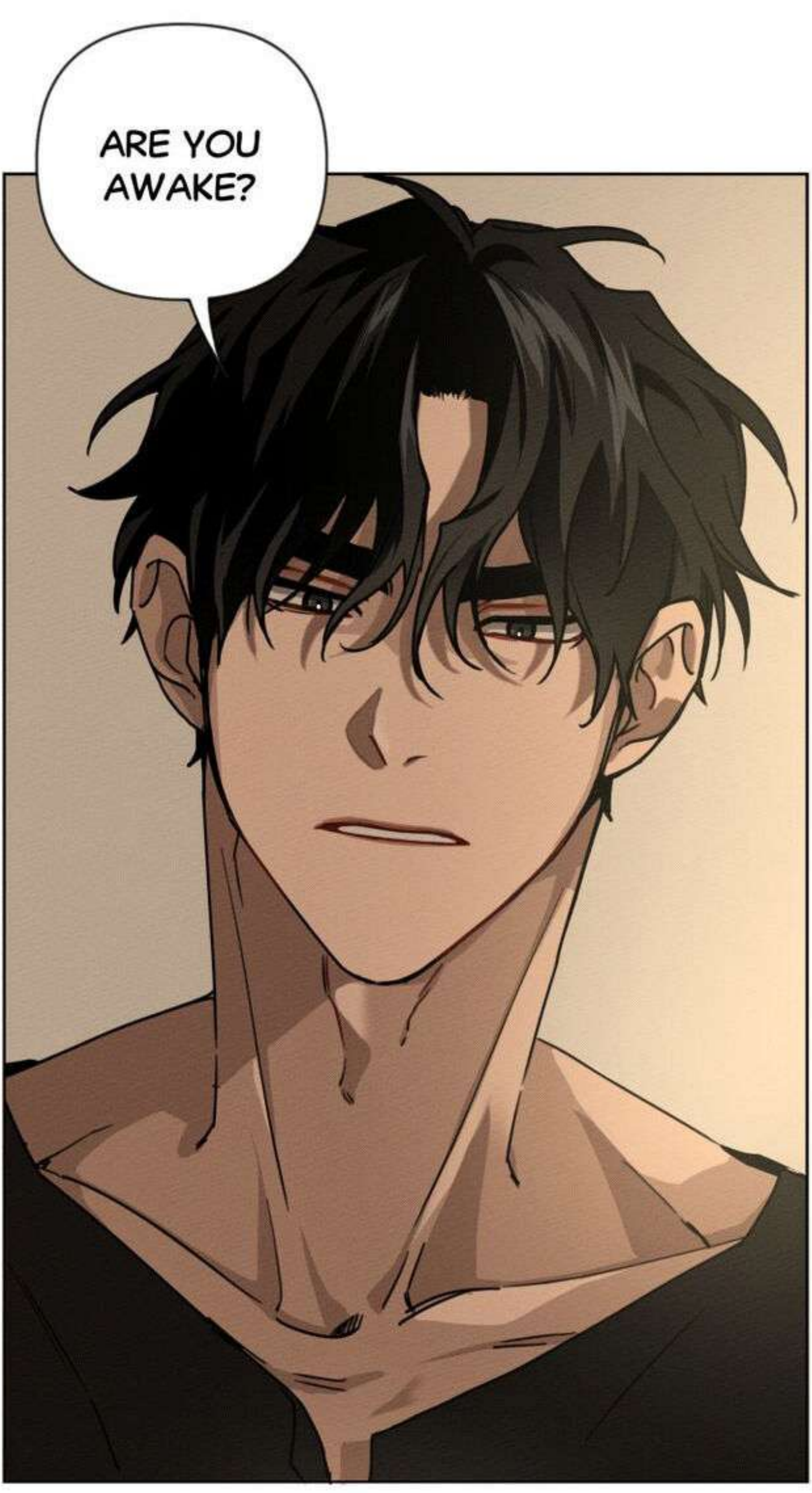
Y-YOU AREN'T
GOING TO LEAVE ME, ARE YOU?
WHIMPER..
SQUEEZE

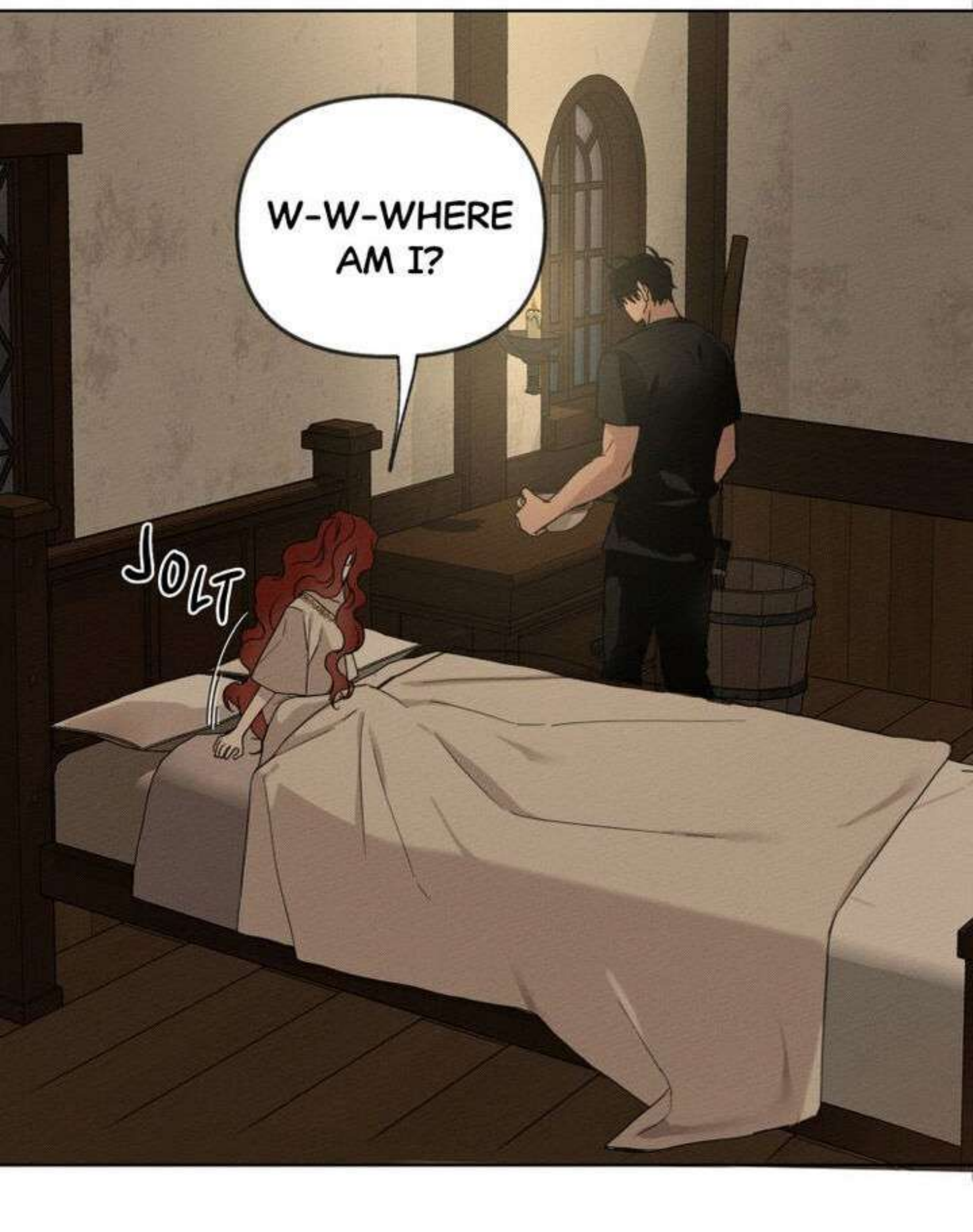
BUT I'M JUST A USELESS THING WHO DESERVES TO BE PUNISHED.

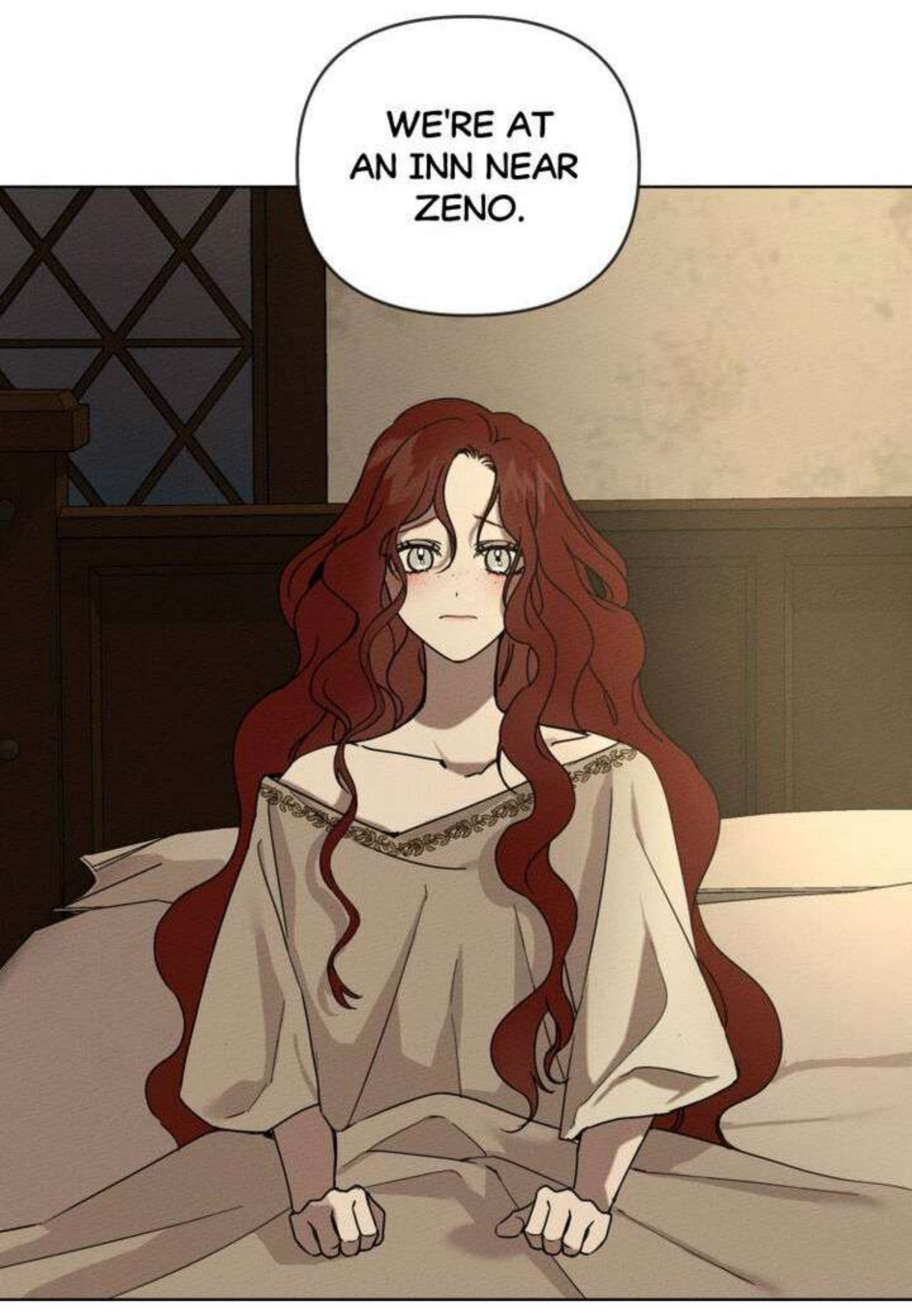
IT'S ONLY RIGHT THAT I BE

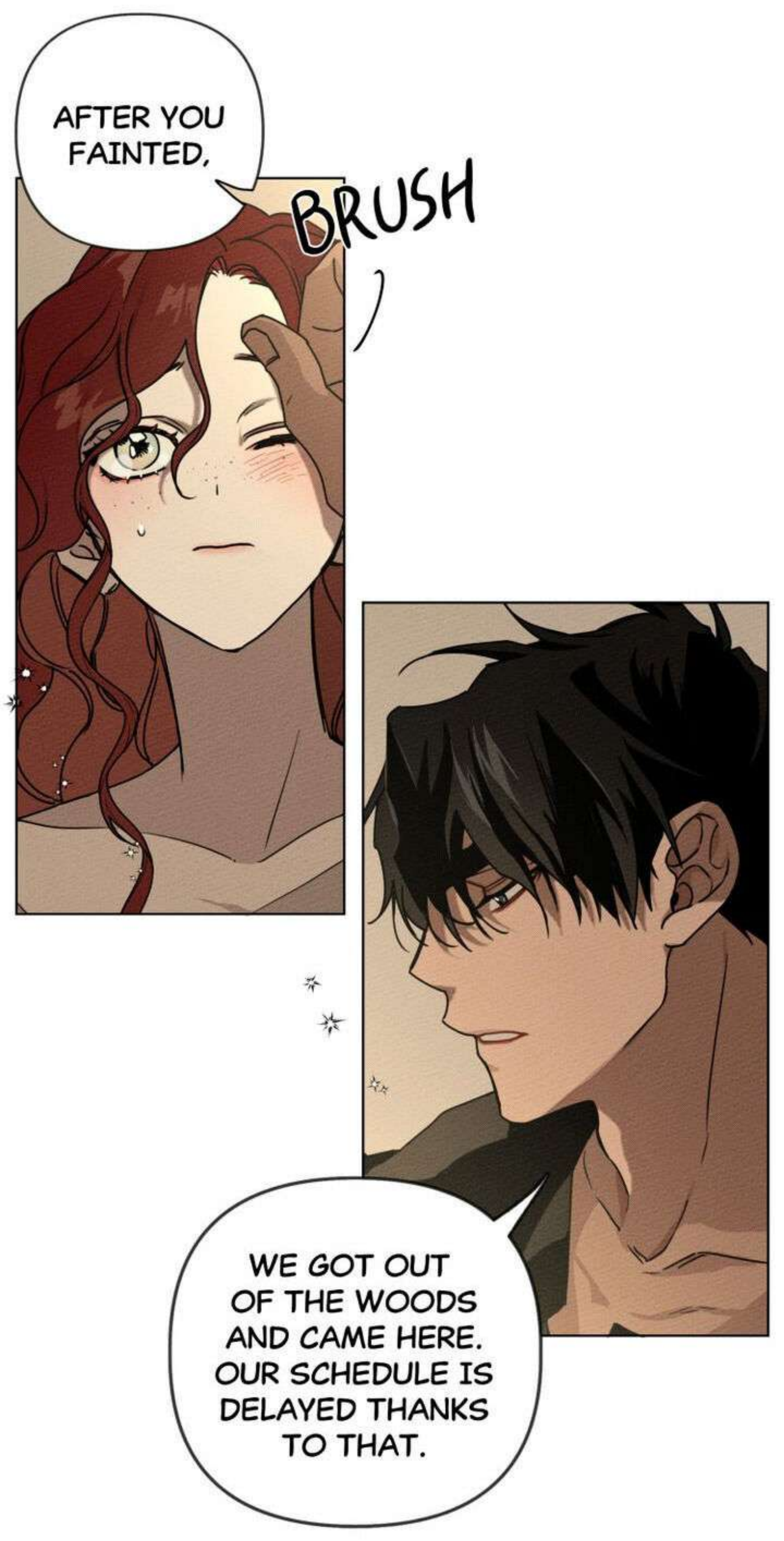
ABANDONED, LIKE AN UNWANTED HOUSE.
CRACK
AN OUTCAST.
MAXI!

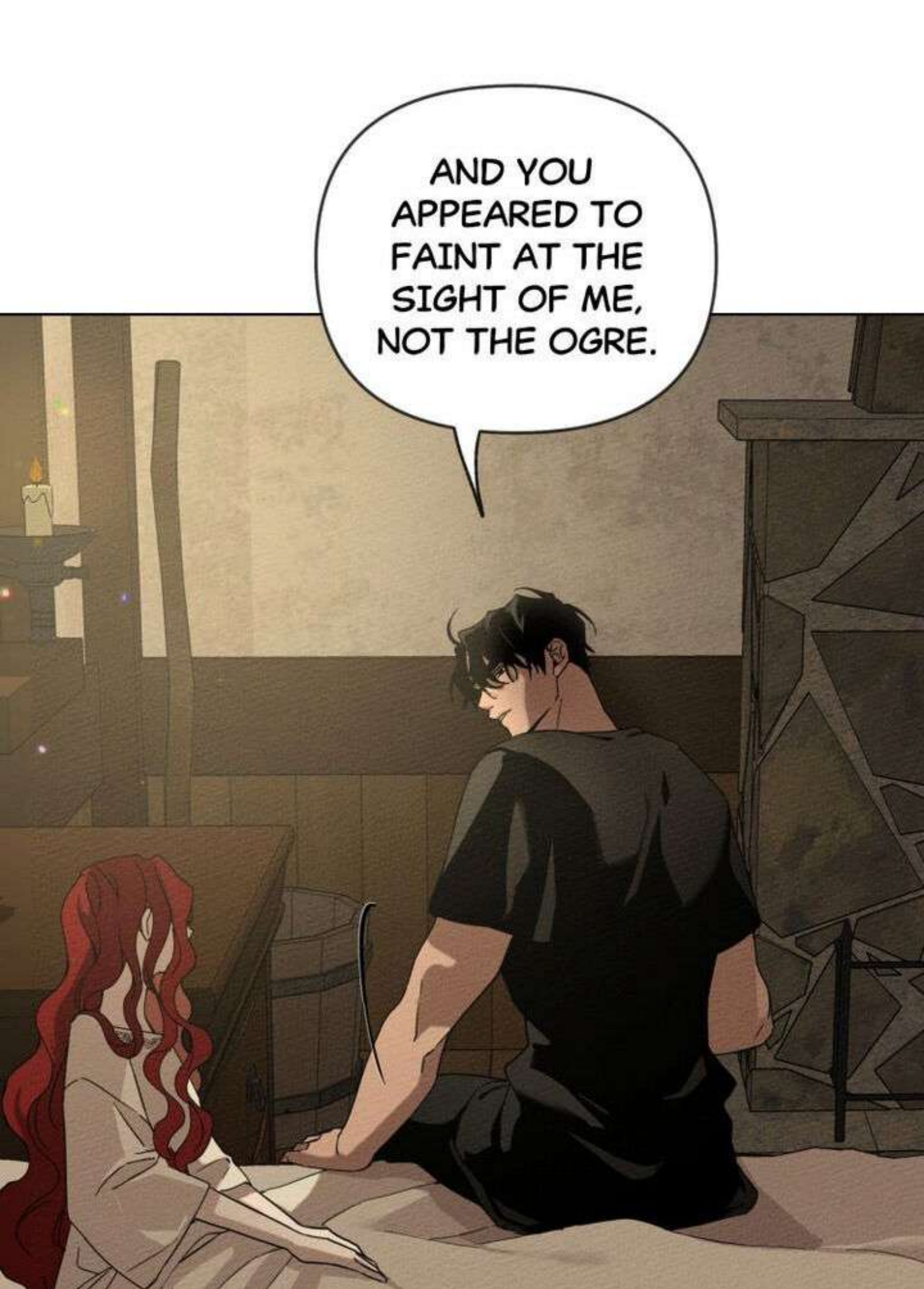



ARE YOU AWAKE?


W-W-WHERE AM I?
JOLT

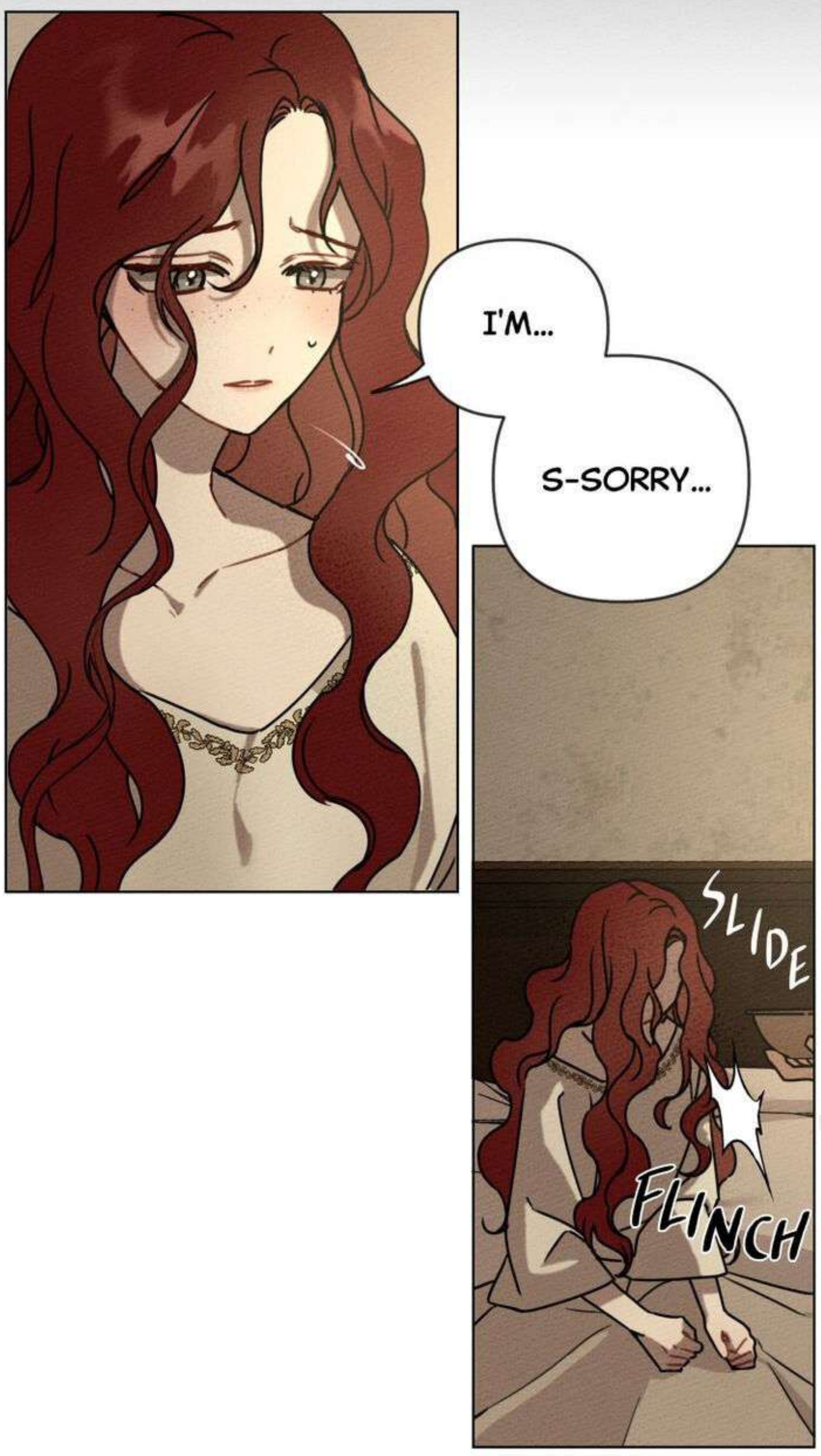

WE'RE AT AN INN NEAR ZENO.

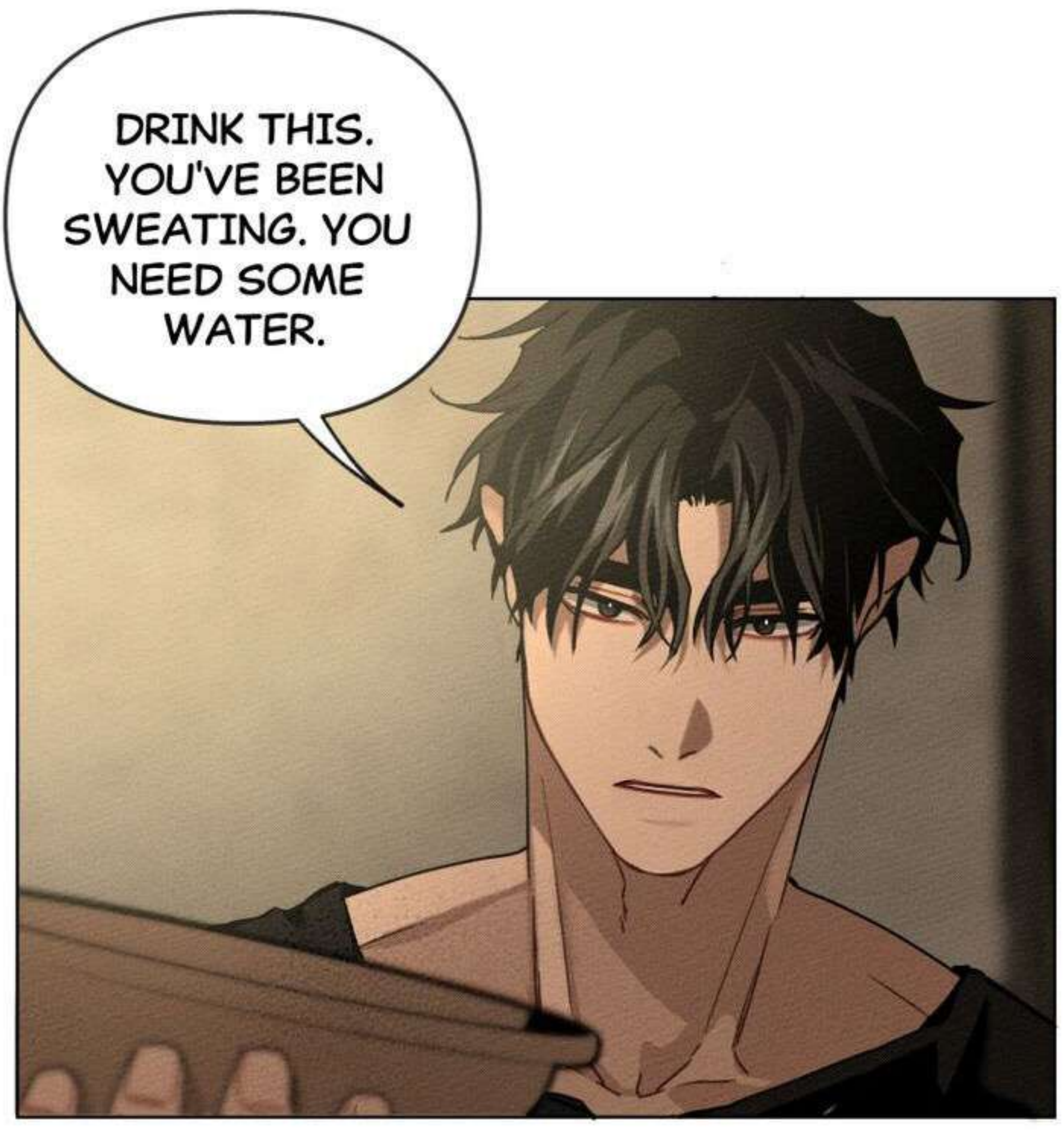

AFTER YOU FAINTED,
BRUSH
WE GOT OUT OF THE WOODS AND CAME HERE. OUR SCHEDULE IS DELAYED THANKS TO THAT.


AND YOU APPEARED TO FAINT AT THE SIGHT OF ME, NOT THE OGRE.

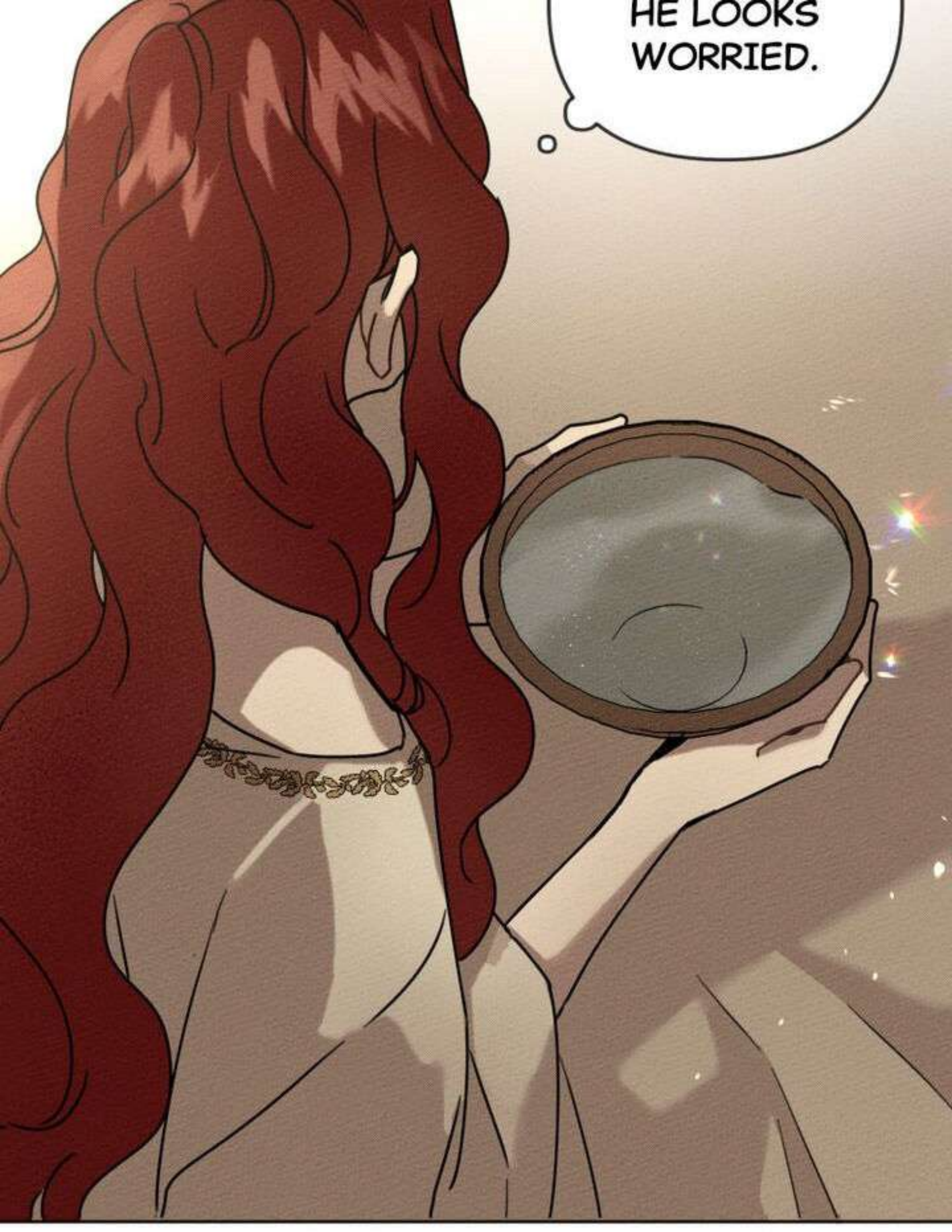
—HUH?

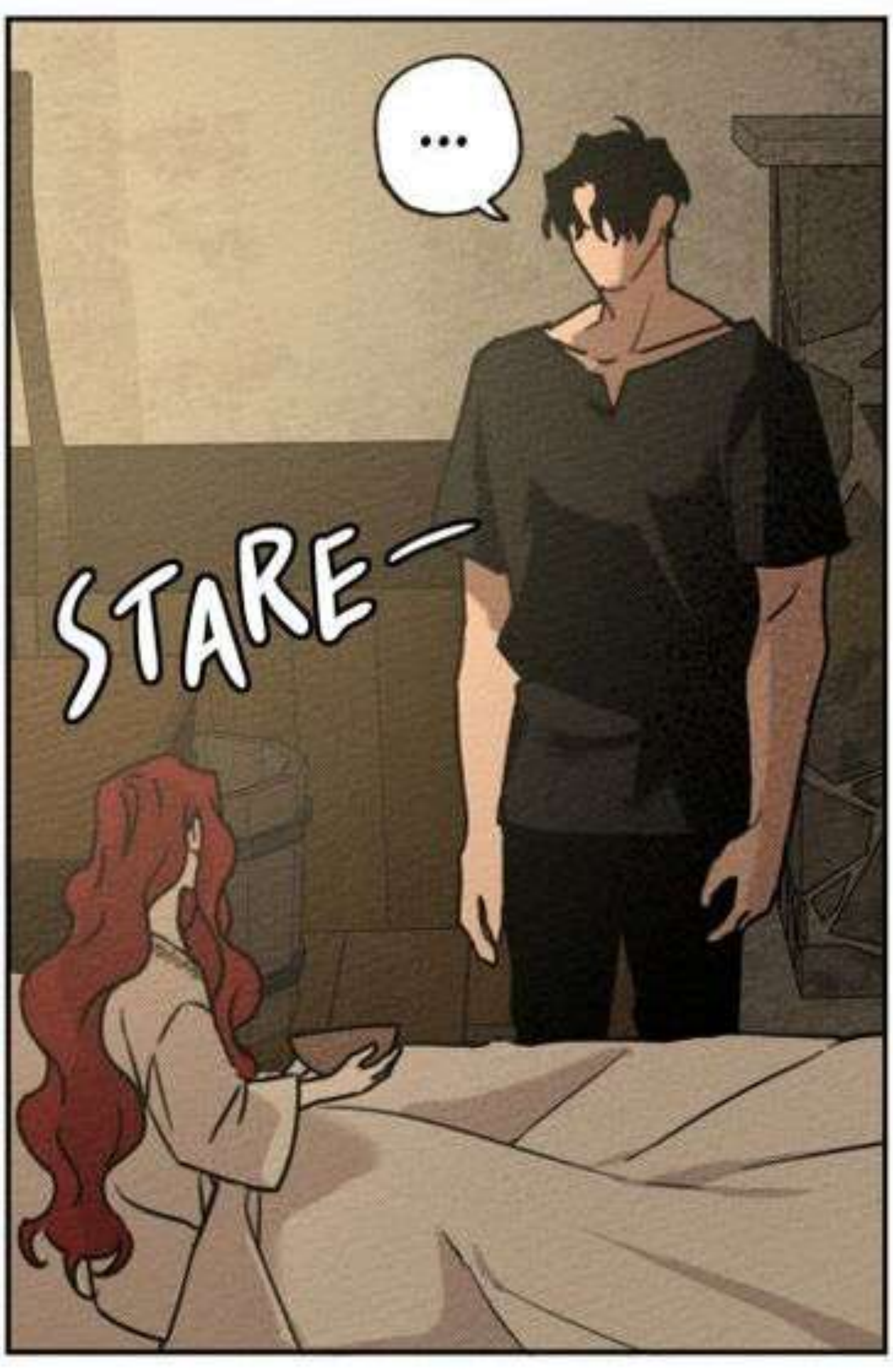
MY LADY!
ARE YOU OKAY?
MAXI!!!
URGH-
B- BLERGH
OH GOD...
UGHH

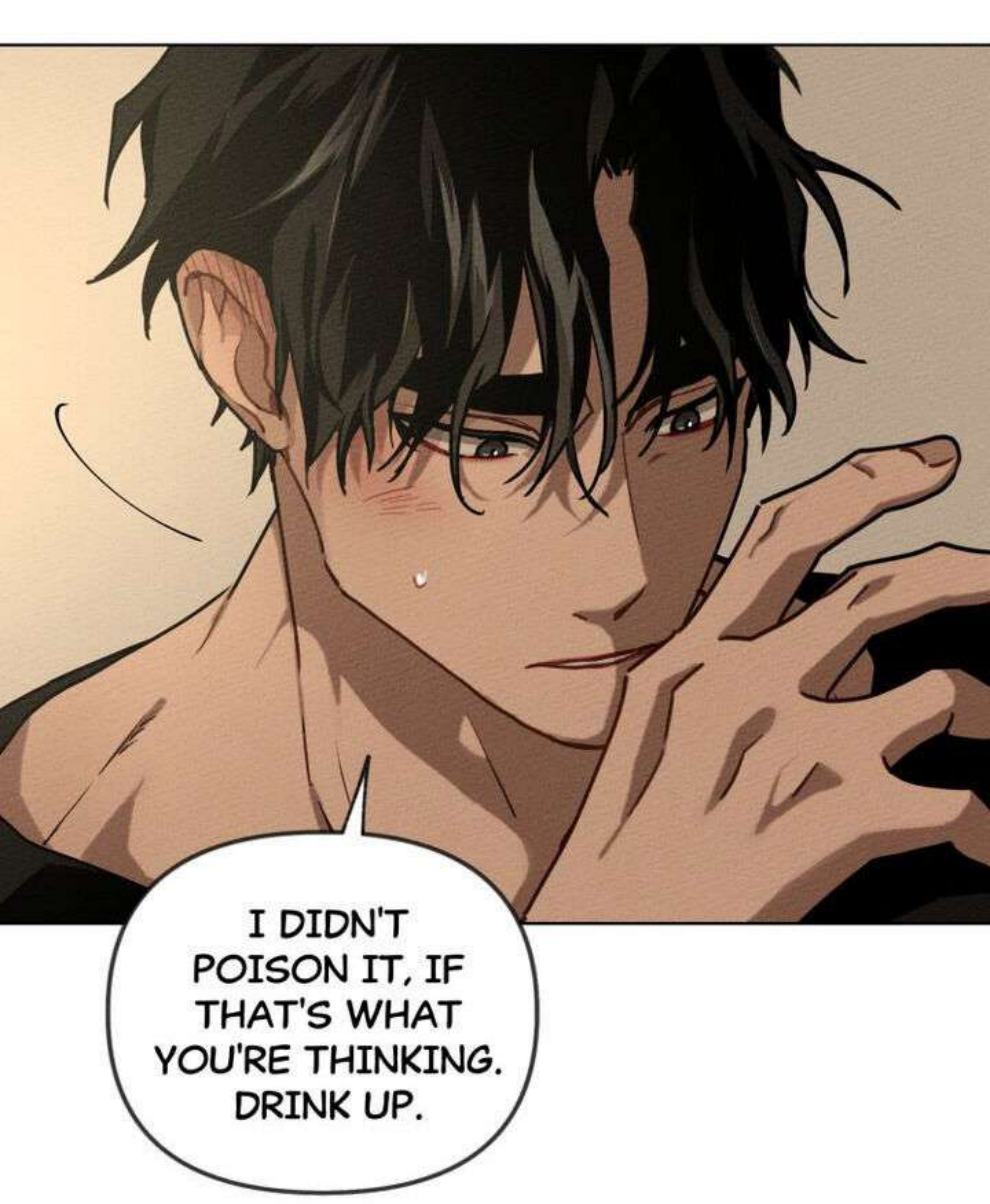

I'M...
S-SORRY...
SLIDE
FLINCH

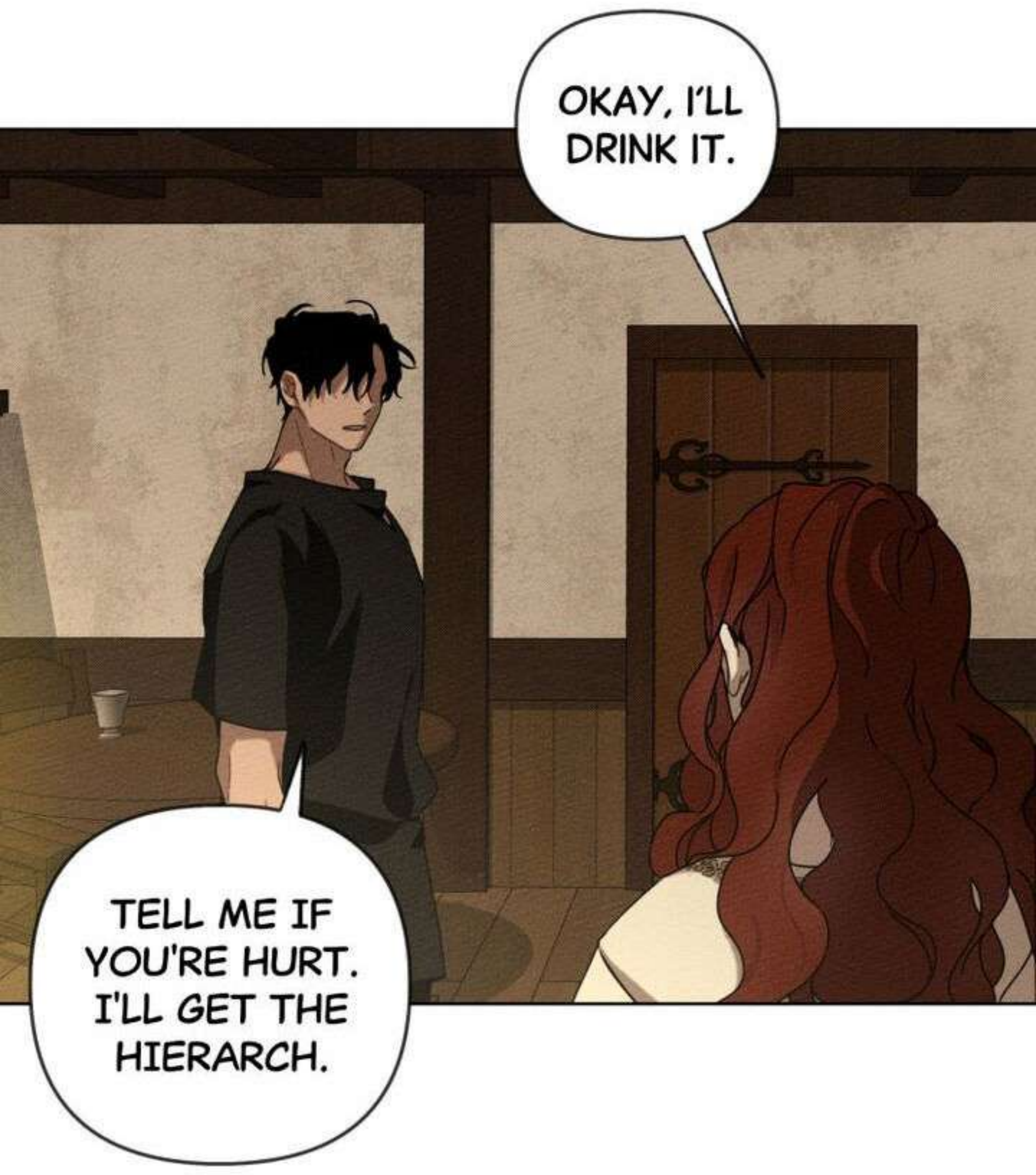

DRINK THIS. YOU'VE BEEN SWEATING. YOU NEED SOME WATER.

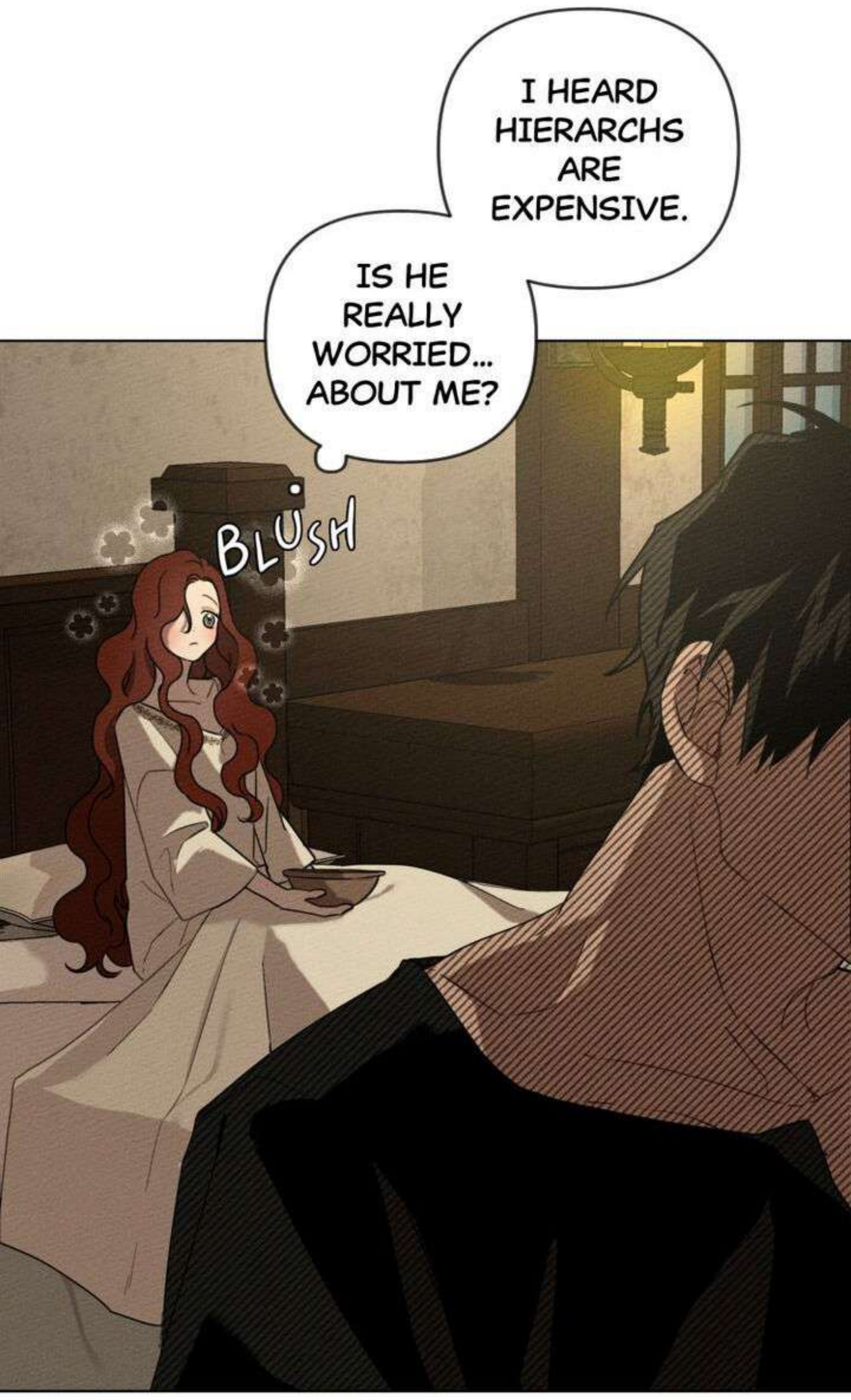
IS HE NOT MAD? IF FATHER WERE HERE, THERE'D BE A CANE FLYING AT ME BY NOW.
INSTEAD,

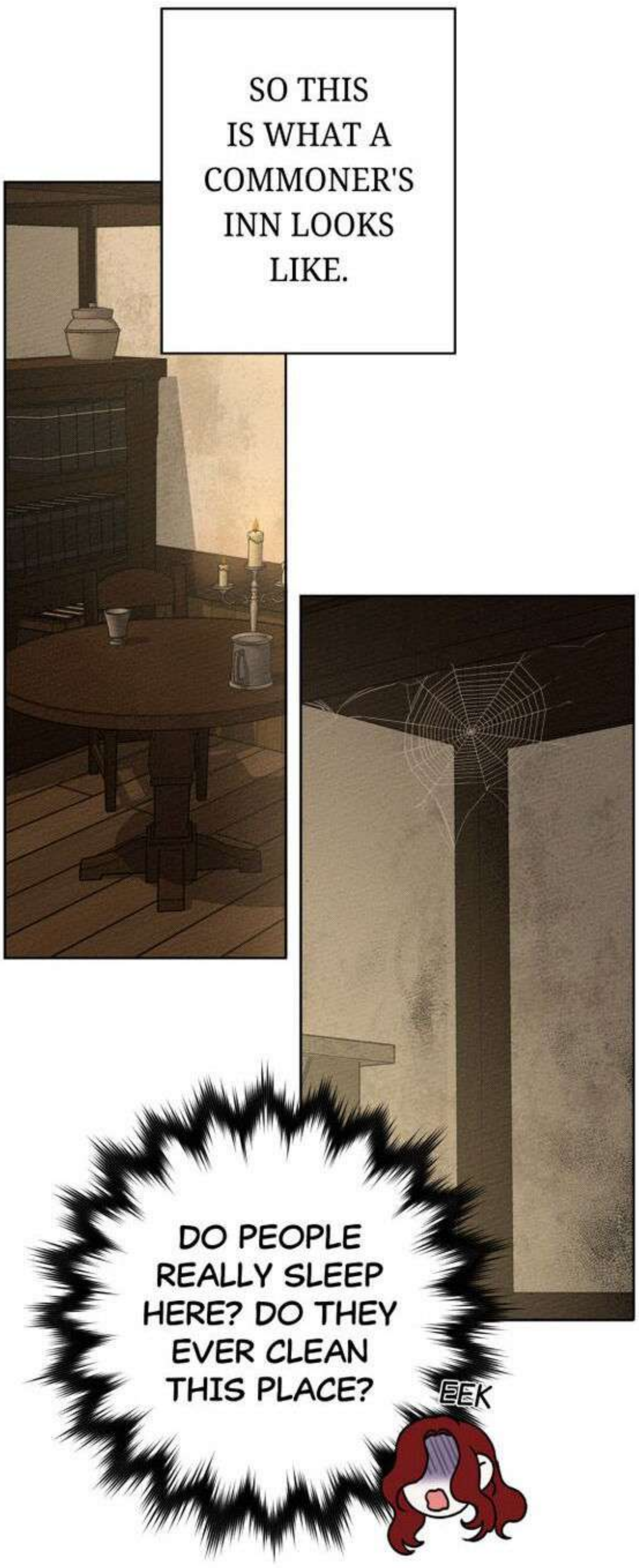

HE LOOKS WORRIED.

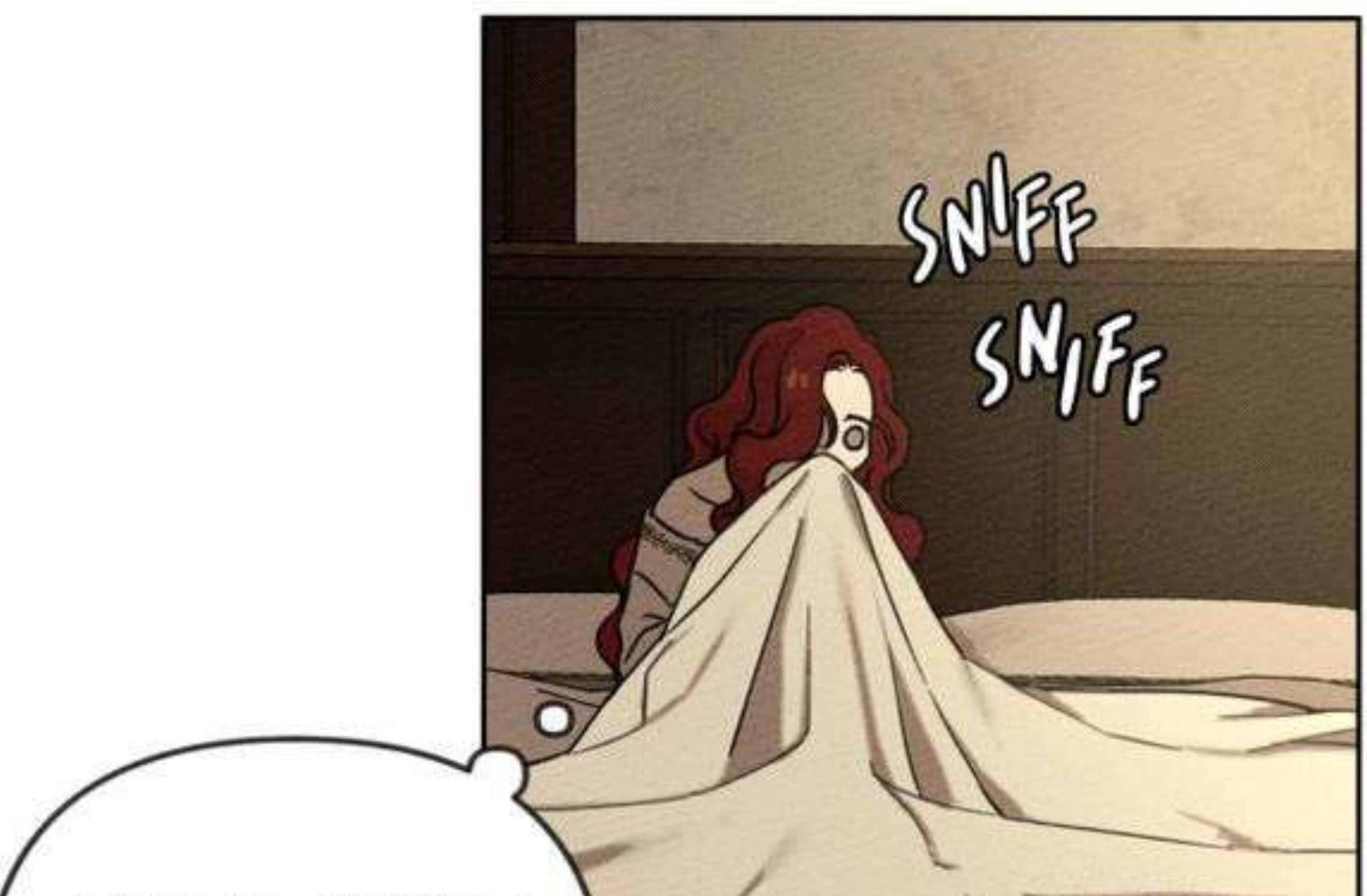

...
STARE—

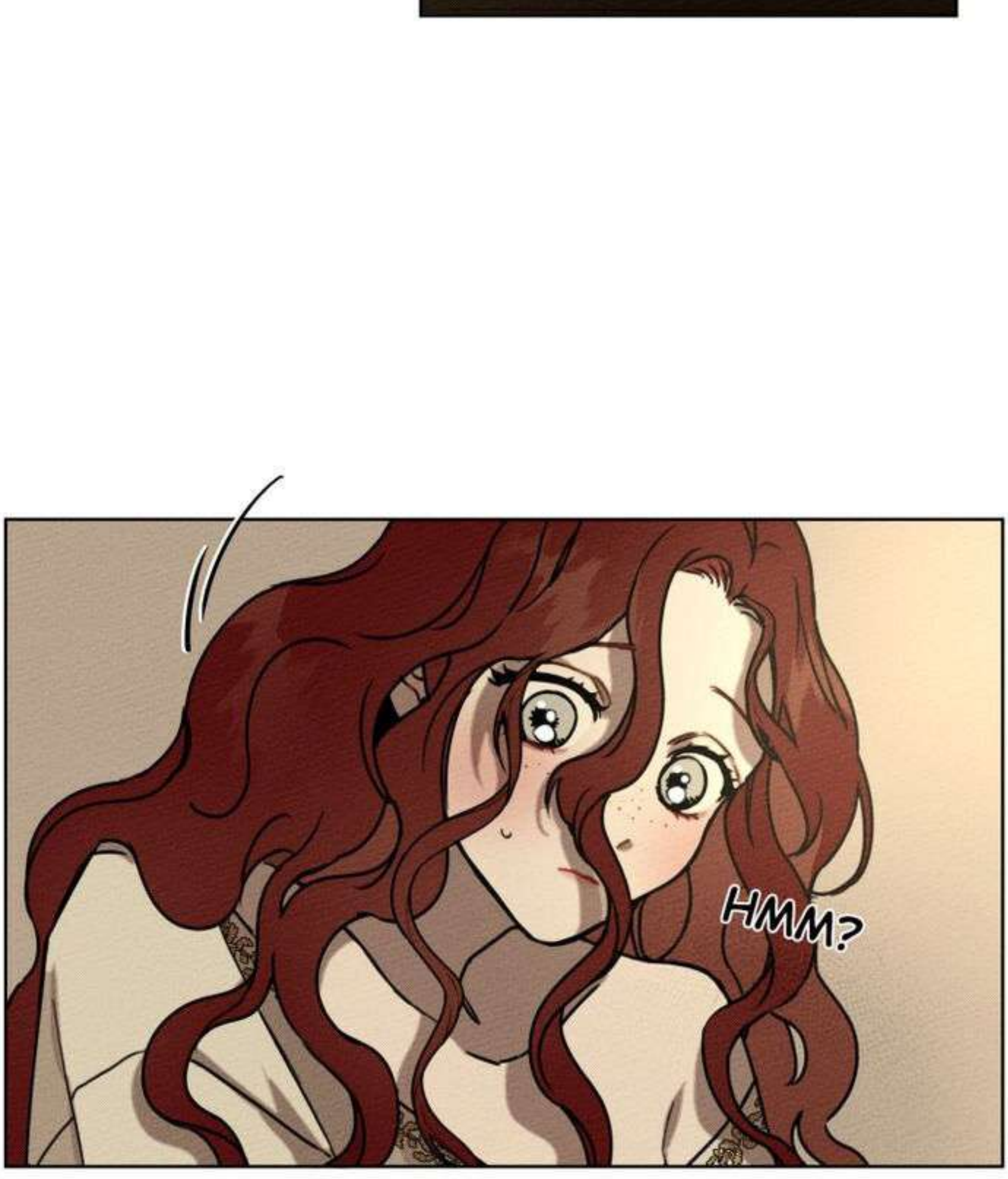

I DIDN'T POISON IT, IF THAT'S WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. DRINK UP.

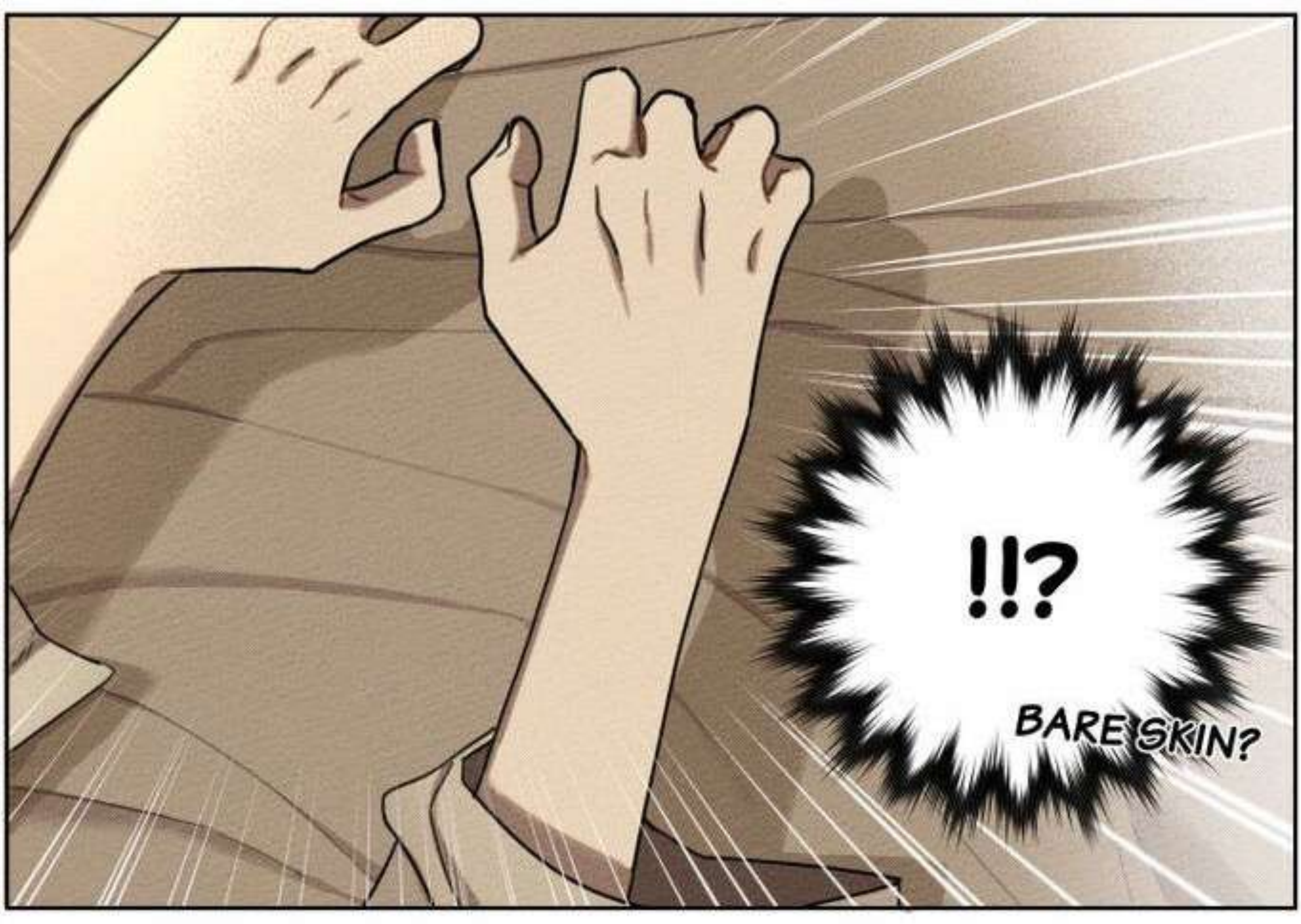

OKAY, I'LL DRINK IT.
TELL ME IF YOU'RE HURT. I'LL GET THE HIERARCH.


I HEARD HIERARCHS ARE EXPENSIVE.
IS HE REALLY WORRIED... ABOUT ME?
BLUSH

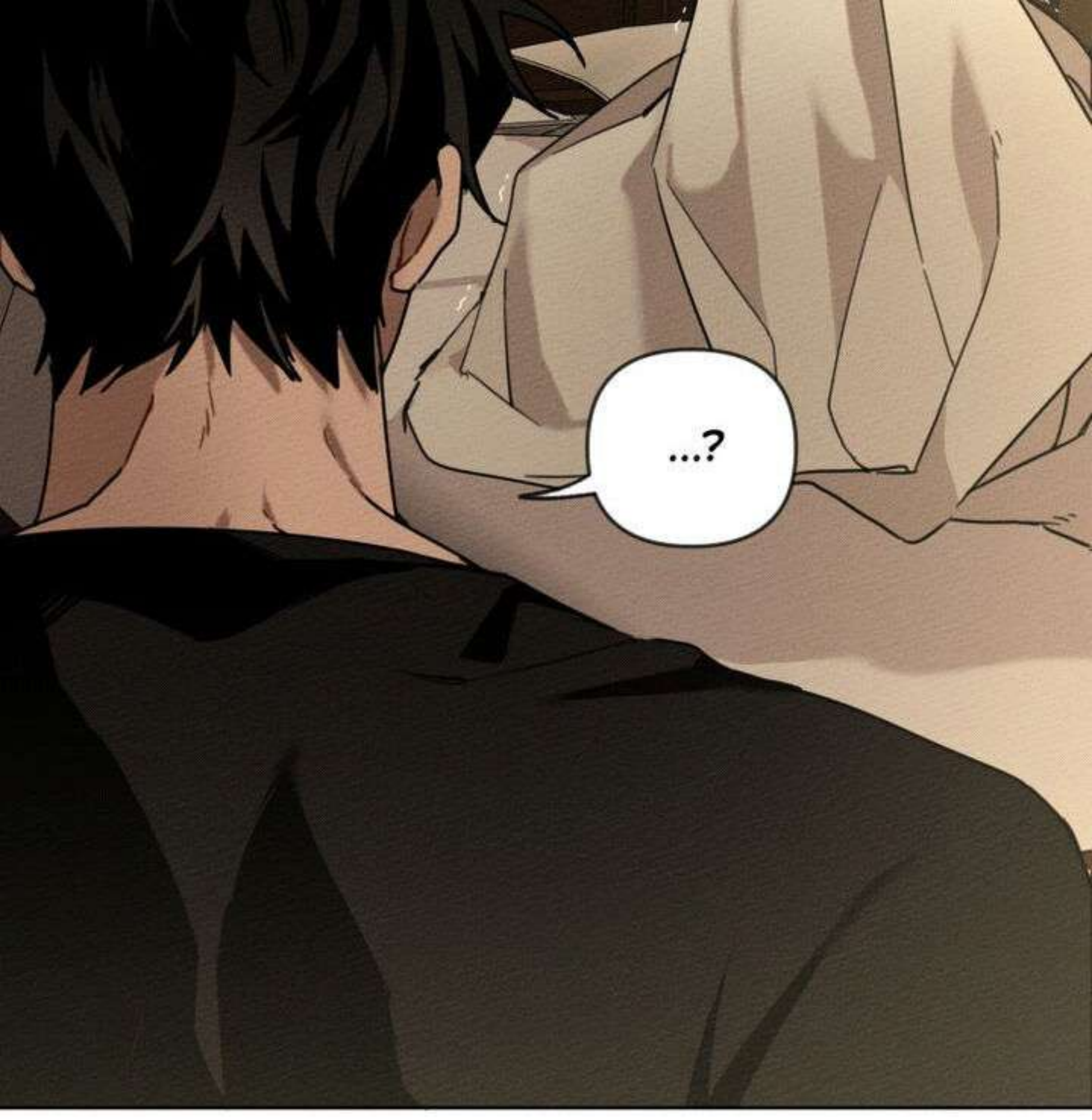

SO THIS IS WHAT A COMMONER'S INN LOOKS LIKE.
DO PEOPLE REALLY SLEEP HERE? DO THEY EVER CLEAN THIS PLACE?
EEK

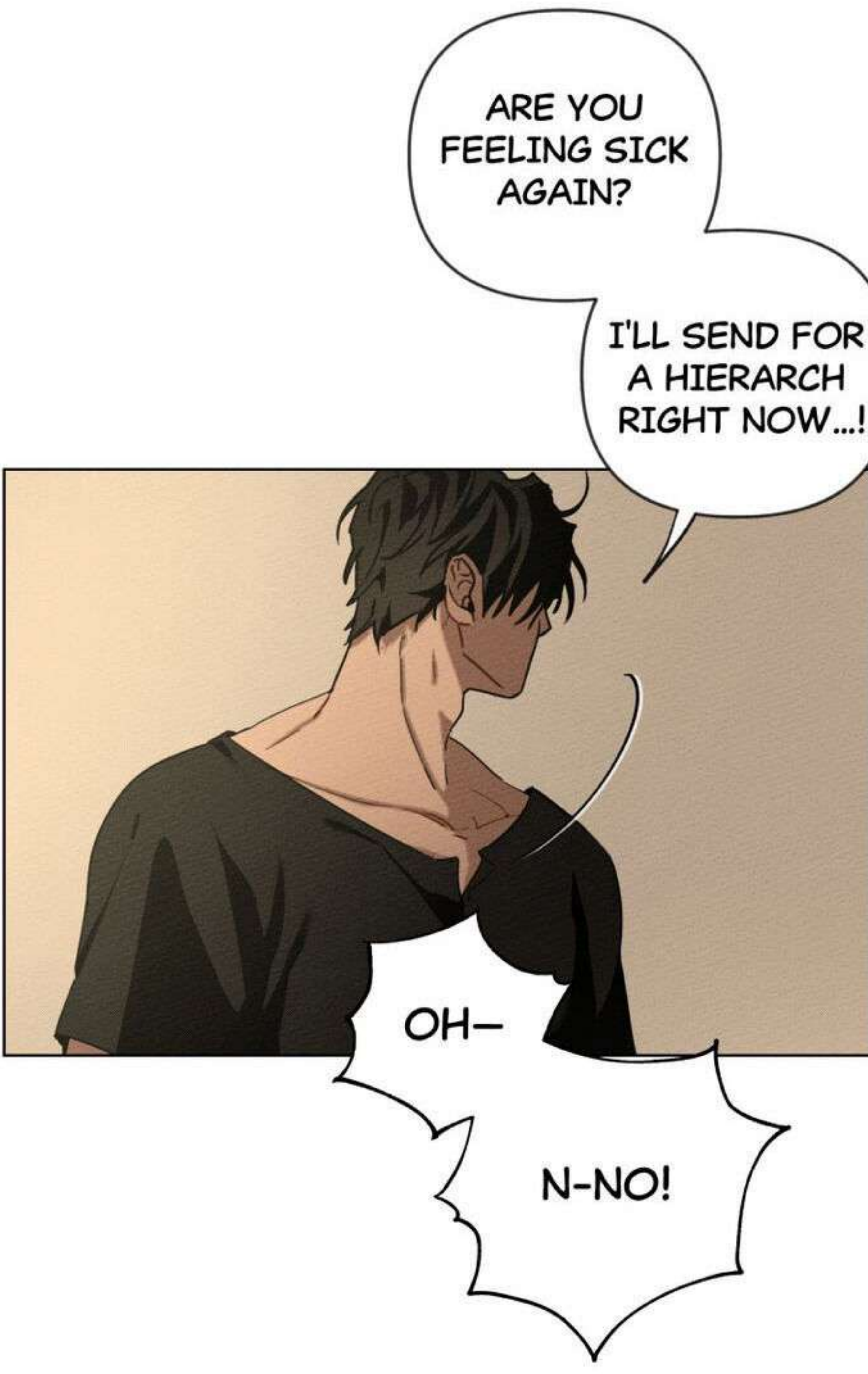

SNIFF
SNIFF
THE BLANKET SMELLS CLEAN. THAT'S A RELIEF.

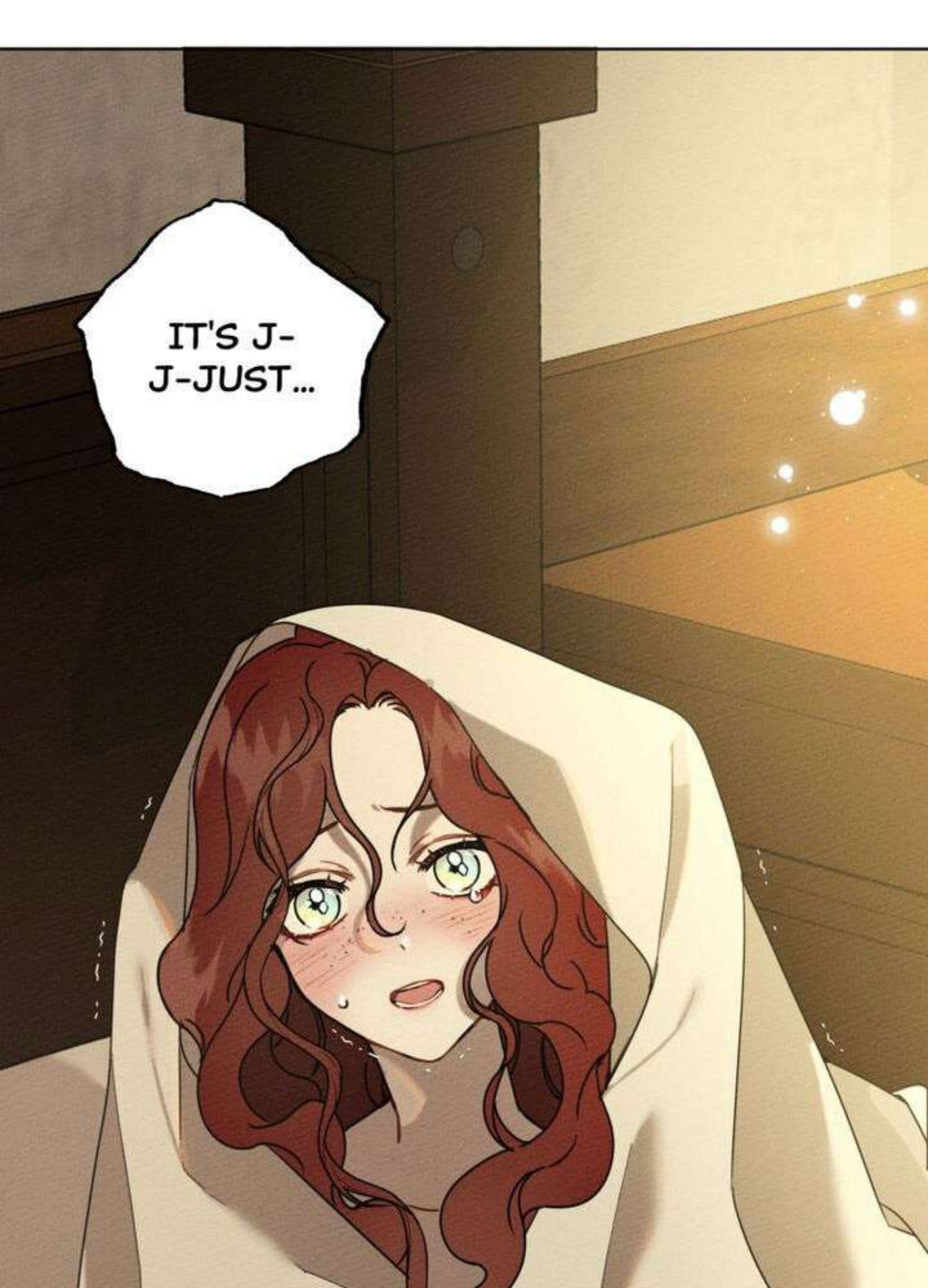

HMM?


!!?
BARE SKIN?

W-WHY AM I...?
WHAT? WHAT'S WRONG?
TREMBLE
TREMBLE

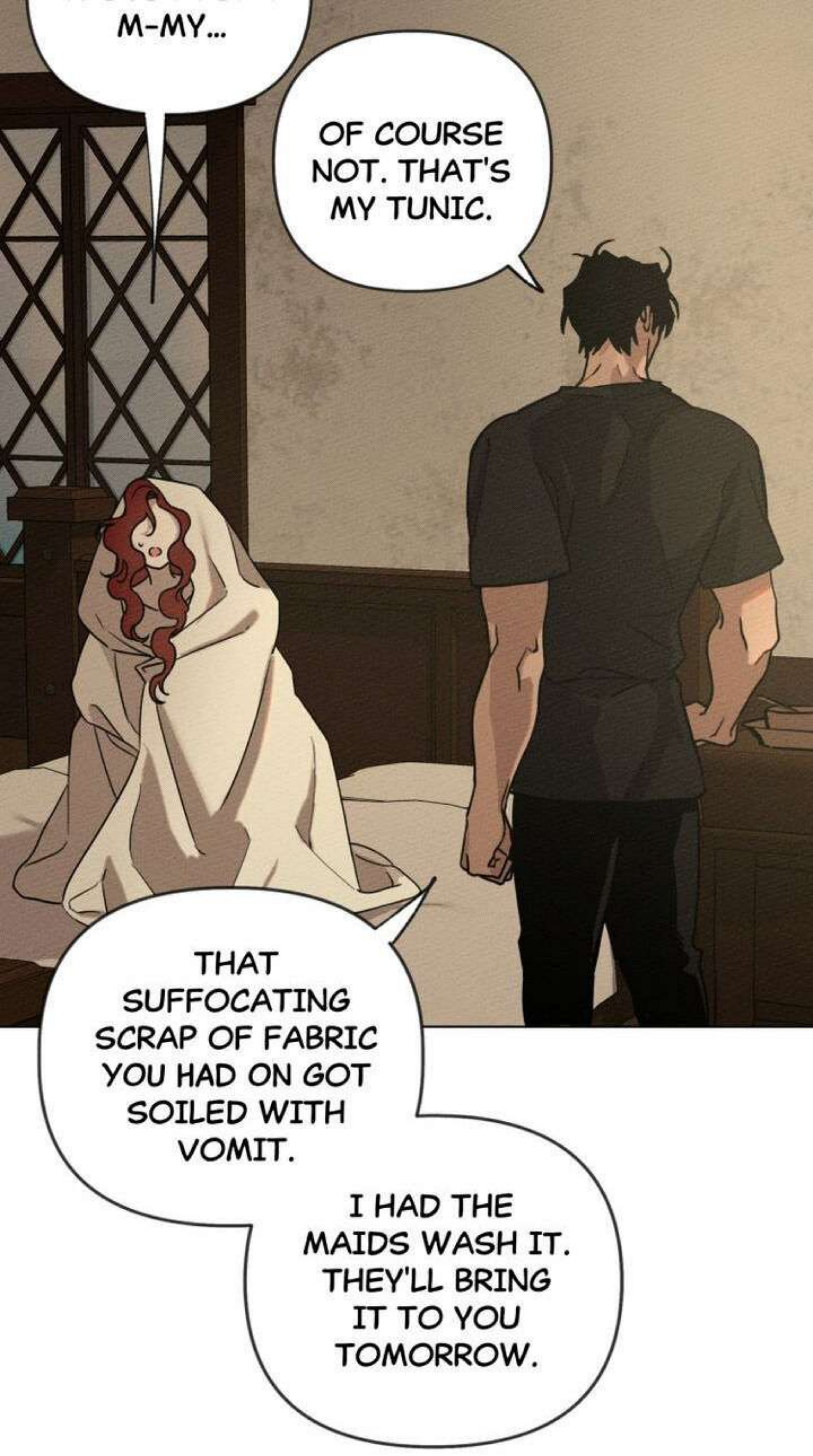

...?

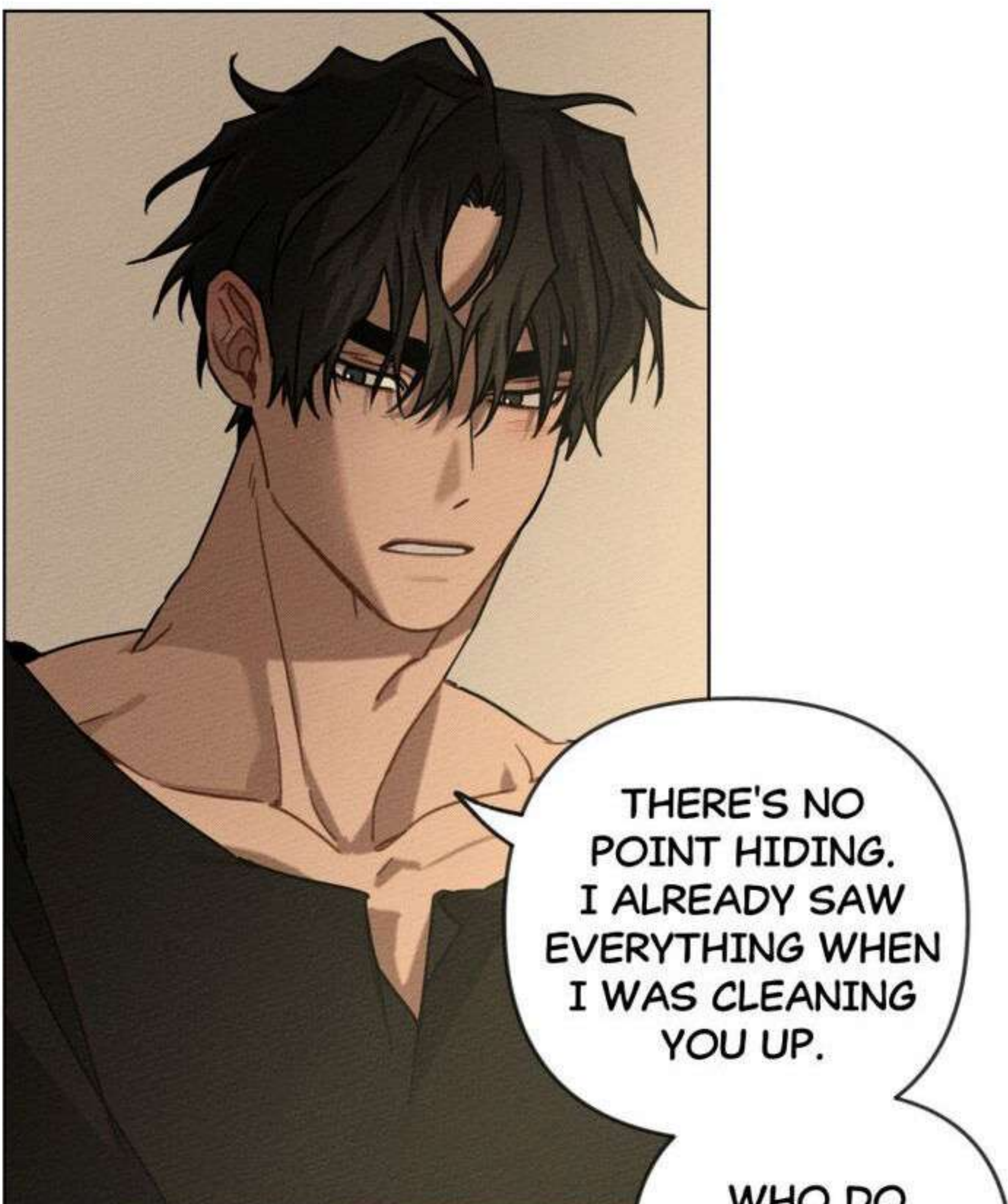

ARE YOU FEELING SICK AGAIN?
I'LL SEND FOR A HIERARCH RIGHT NOW...!
OH–
N-NO!


IT'S J-J-JUST...

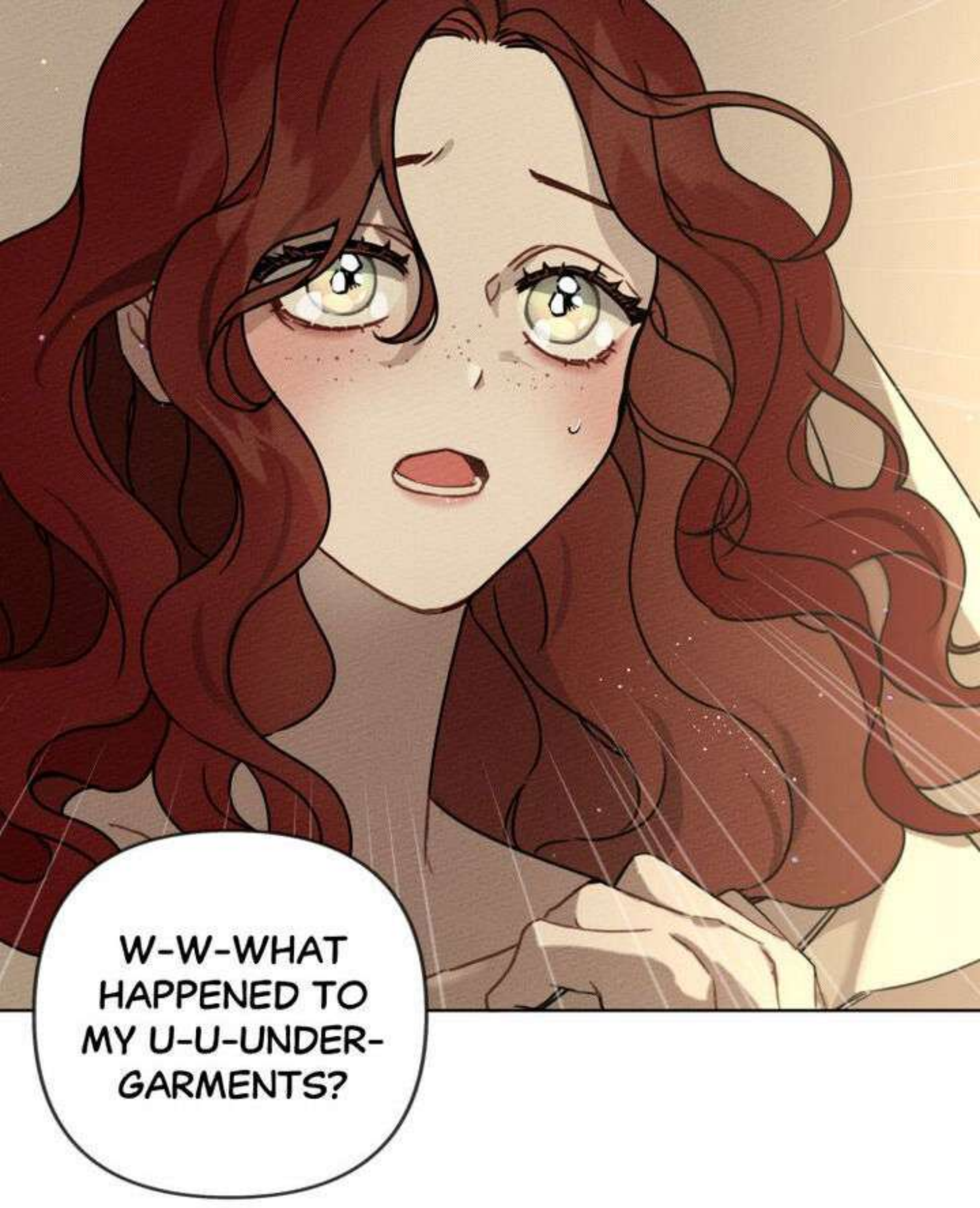
MY C-CLOTHES ARE...! N-NO, I MEAN, I'M N-N-NOT CLOTHED!

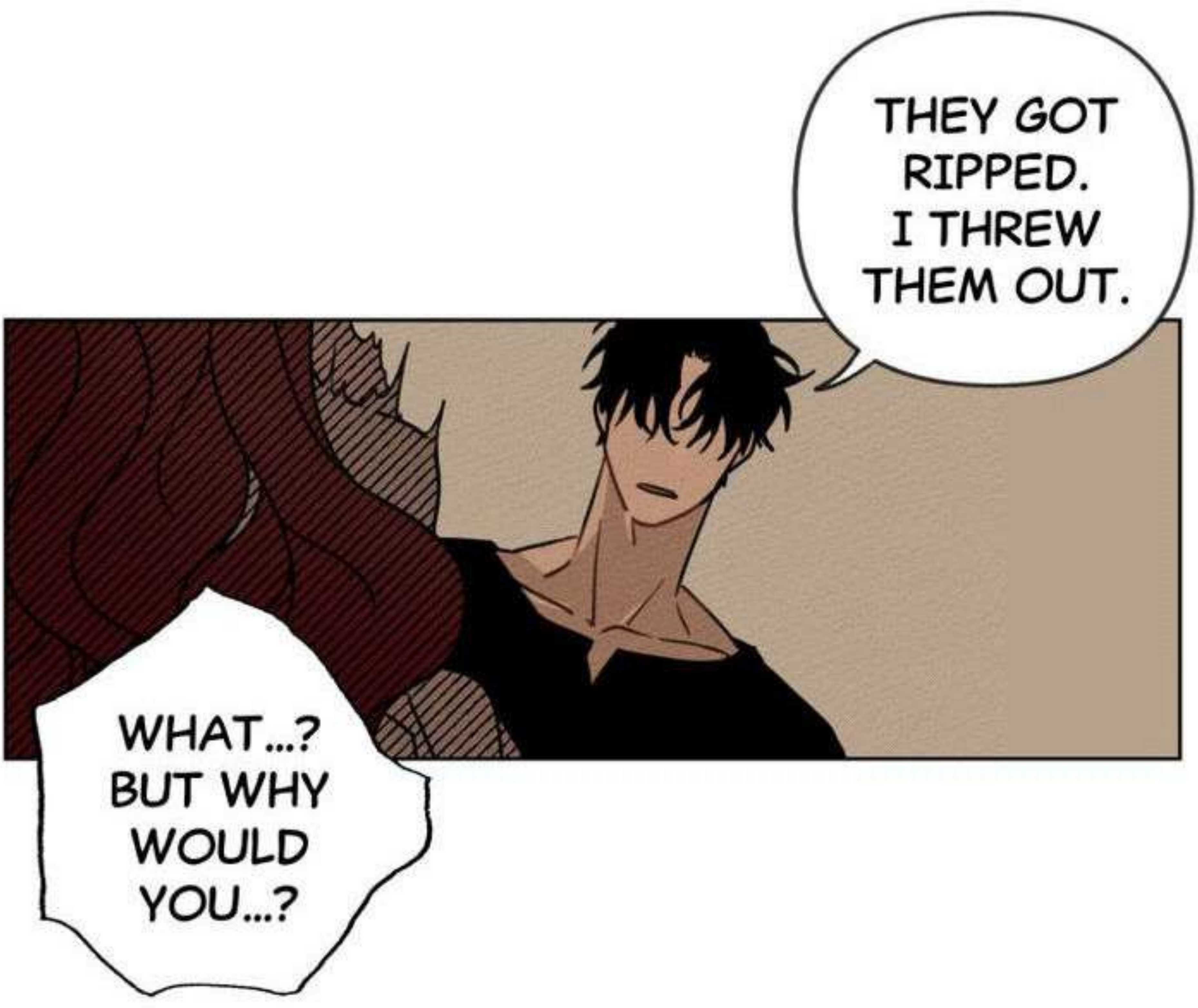
MY UNDERGARMENTS ARE GONE TOO! THE ONES MY MAID FORCED ME INTO THIS MORNING...!
YOU HAVE CLOTHES ON. GET UP.
CLUNK
B-B-BUT THESE AREN'T

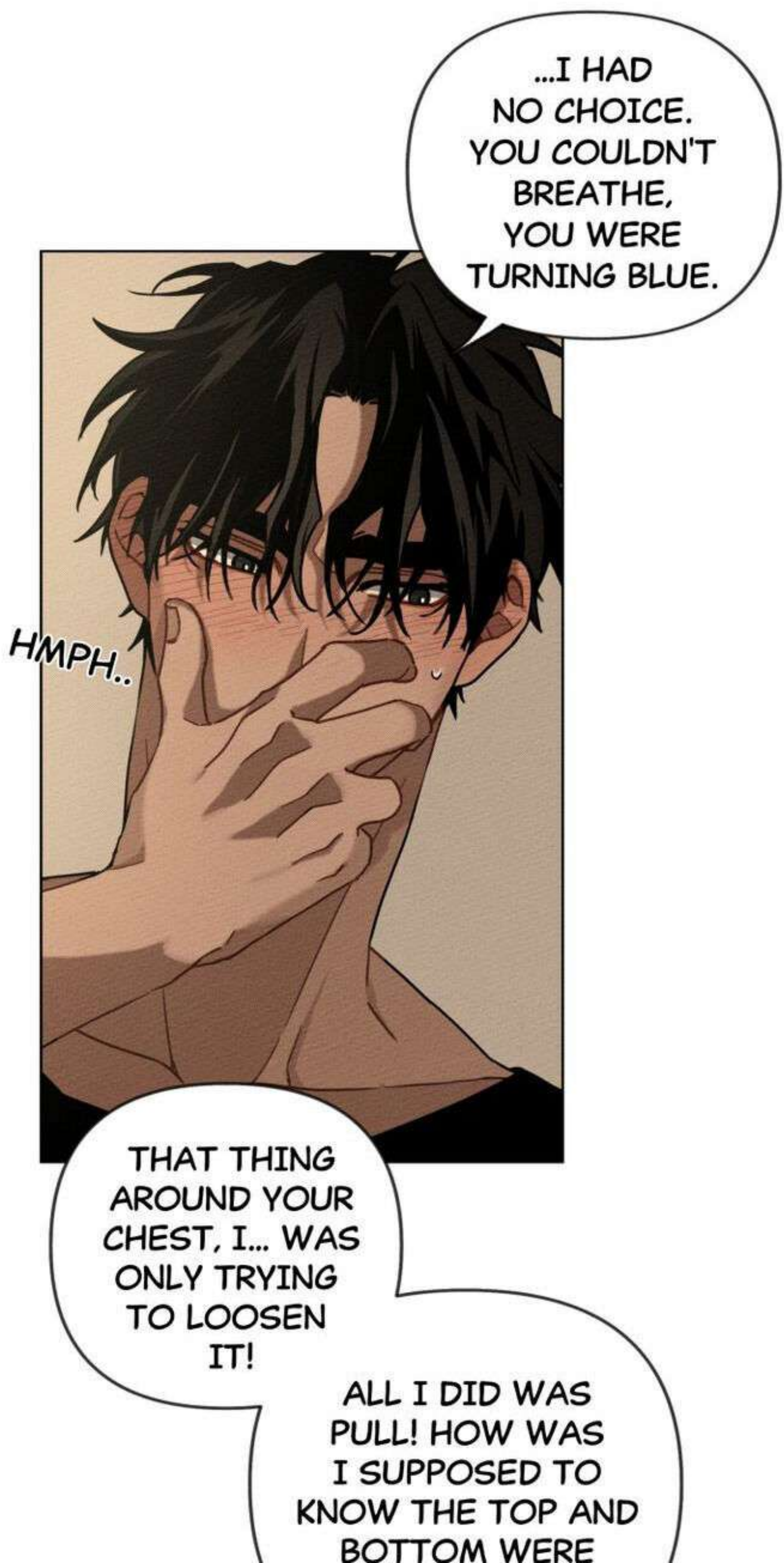

M-MY...
OF COURSE NOT. THAT'S MY TUNIC.
THAT SUFFOCATING SCRAP OF FABRIC YOU HAD ON GOT SOILED WITH VOMIT.
I HAD THE MAIDS WASH IT. THEY'LL BRING IT TO YOU TOMORROW.


THERE'S NO POINT HIDING. I ALREADY SAW EVERYTHING WHEN I WAS CLEANING YOU UP.
WHO DO YOU THINK CHANGED YOU?

C-C-CLEANED ME UP?


W-W-WHAT HAPPENED TO MY U-U-UNDER-GARMENTS?


THEY GOT RIPPED. I THREW THEM OUT.
WHAT...? BUT WHY WOULD YOU...?


...I HAD NO CHOICE. YOU COULDN'T BREATHE, YOU WERE TURNING BLUE.
HMPH..
THAT THING AROUND YOUR CHEST, I... WAS ONLY TRYING TO LOOSEN IT!
ALL I DID WAS PULL! HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW THE TOP AND BOTTOM WERE

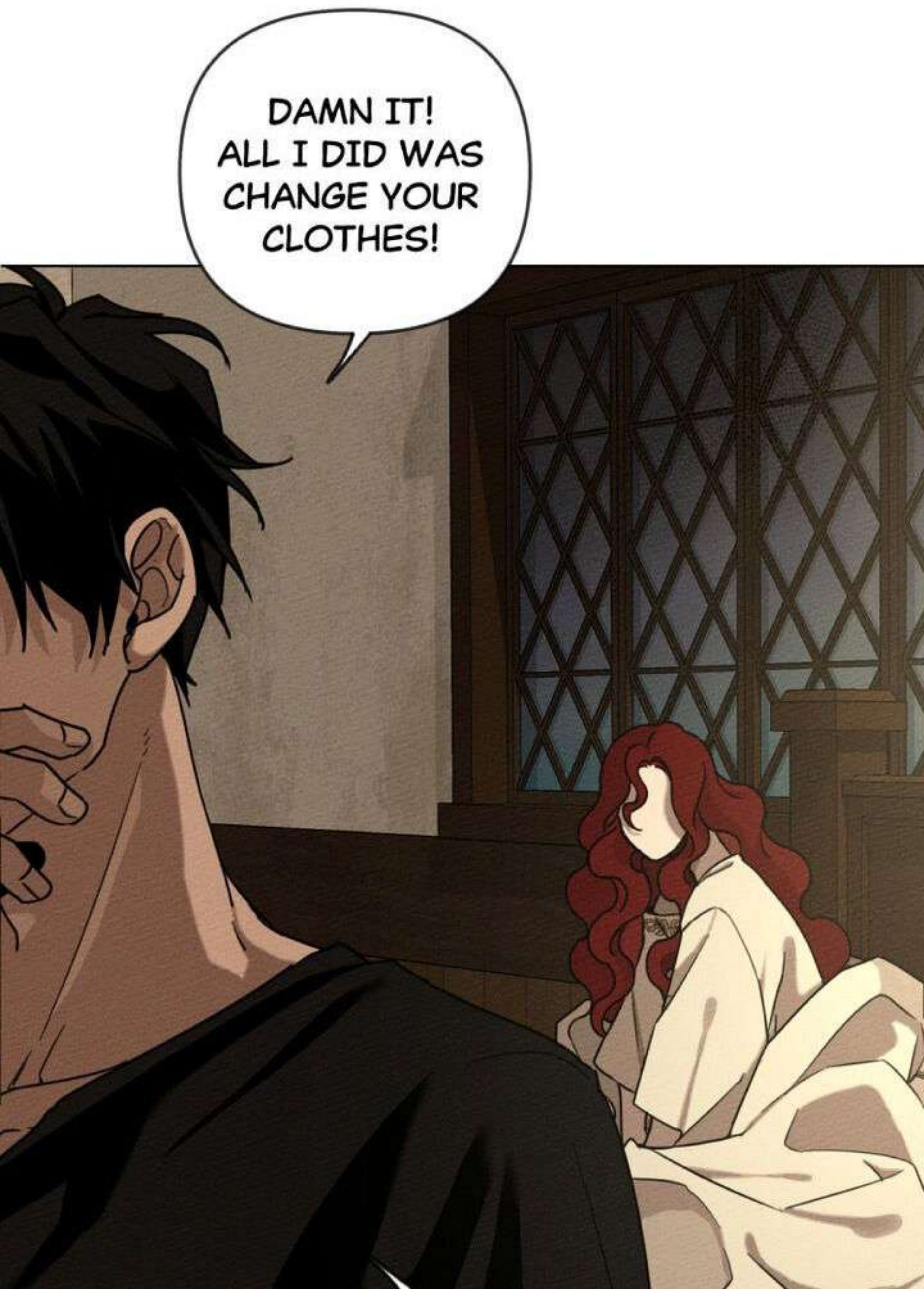
CONNECTED?

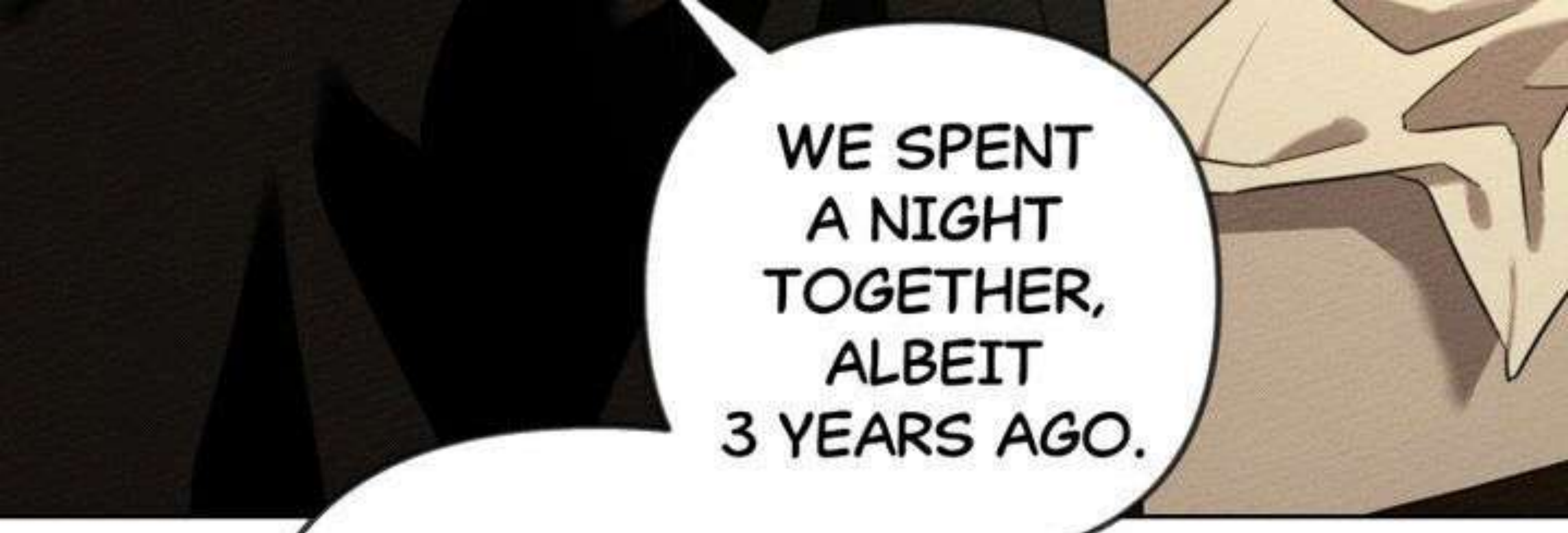
......

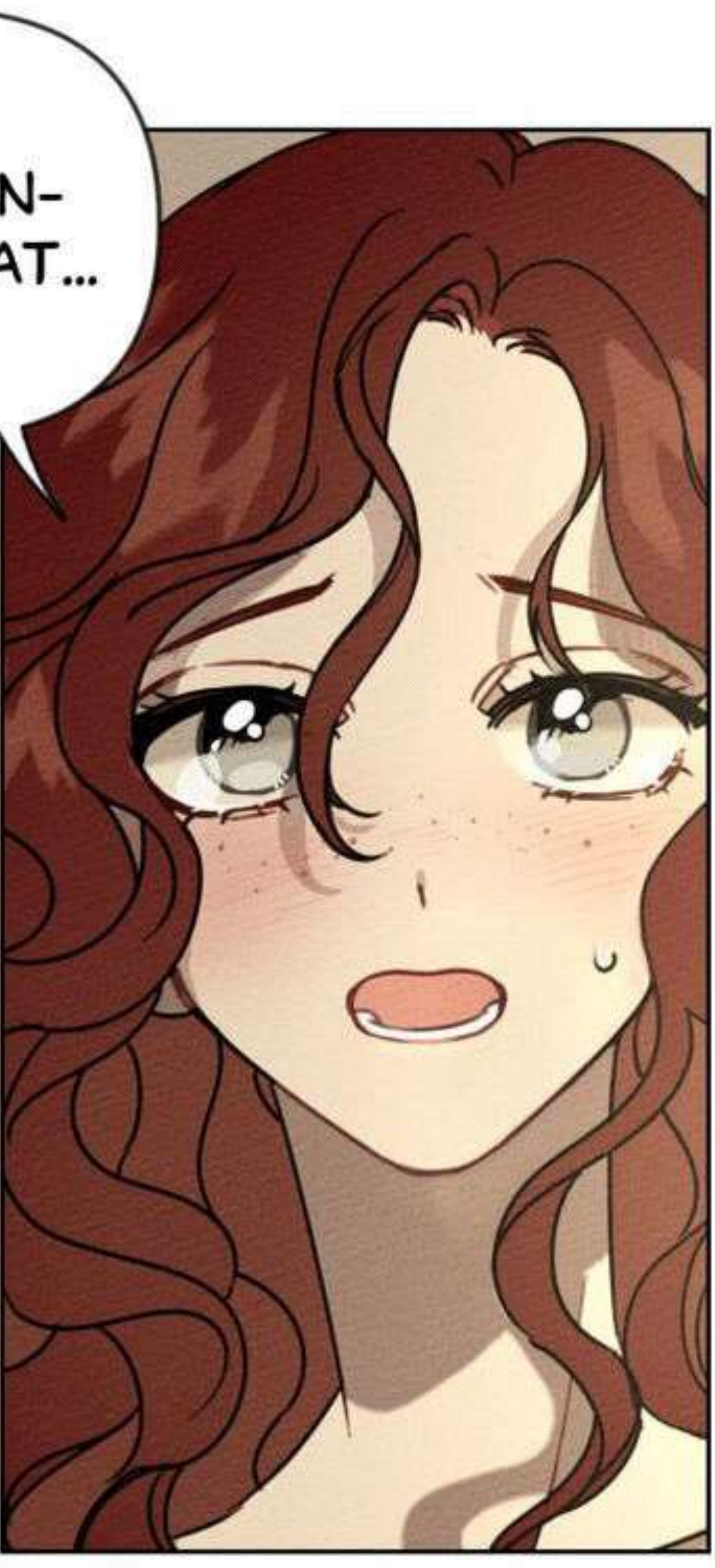
YOU CAN BORROW MINE IF YOU NEED IT.

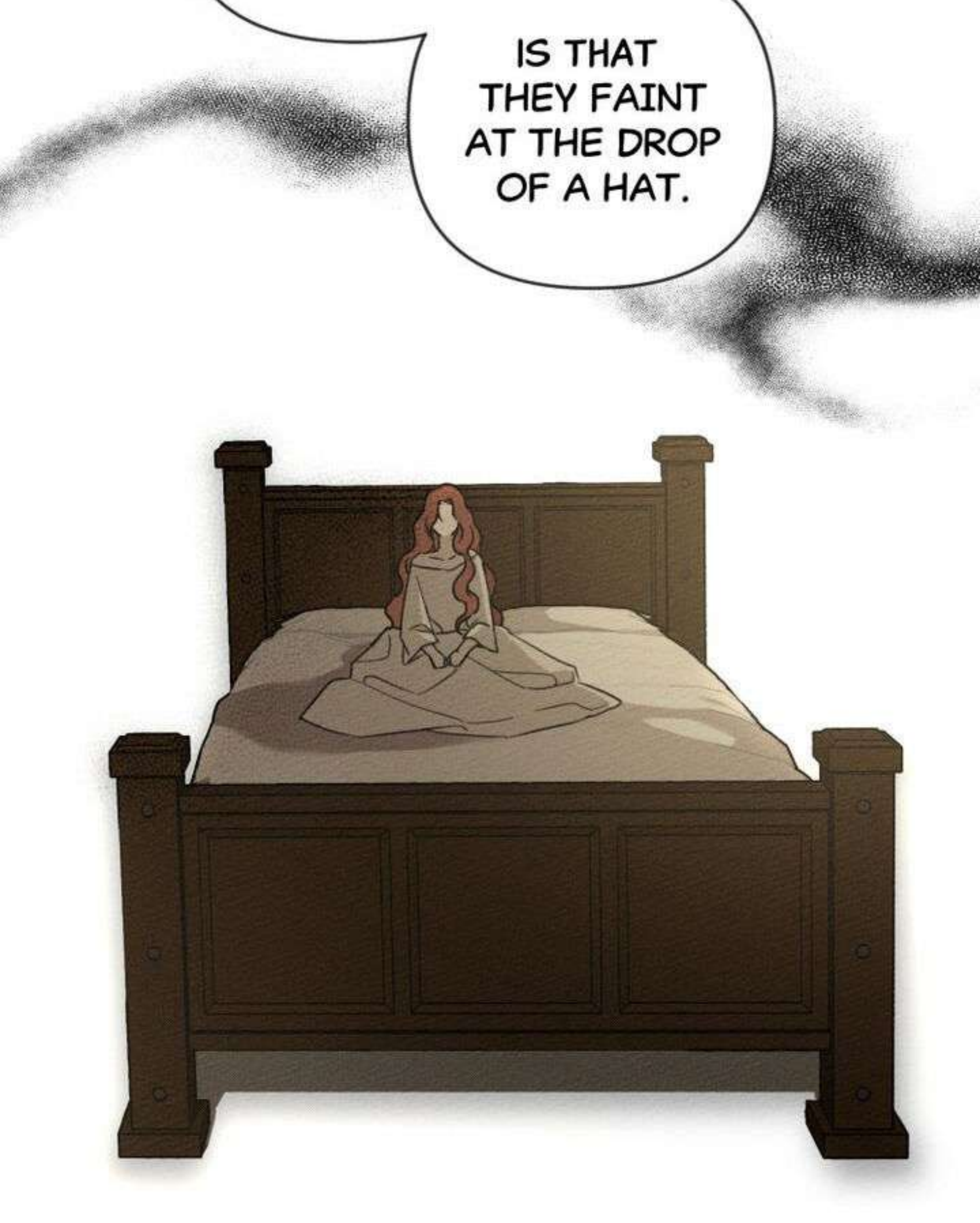
N-NO THANK YOU!

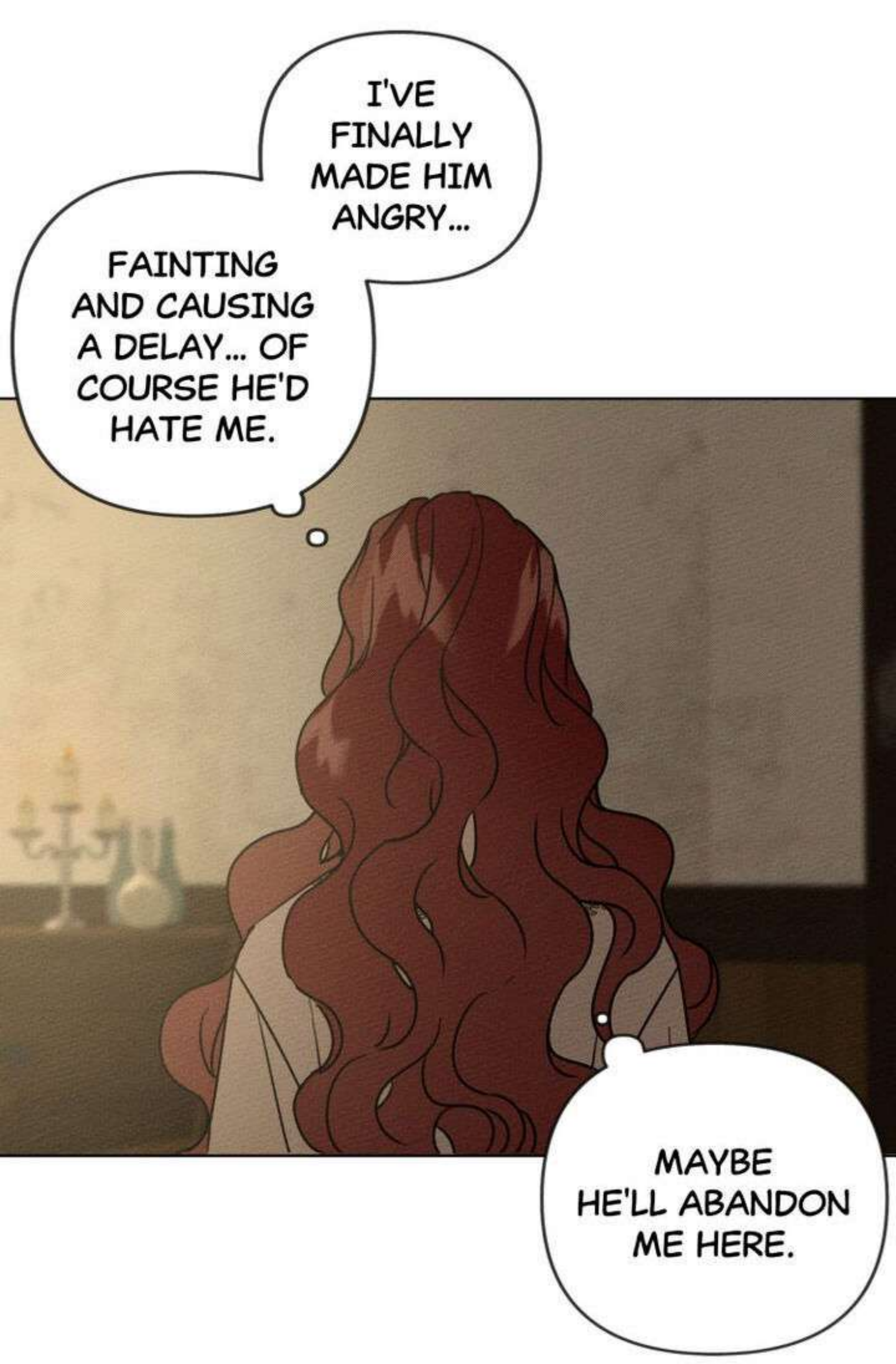
WEARING ONLY A TUNIC FEELS STRANGE, BUT THAT WOULD BE EVEN STRANGER!

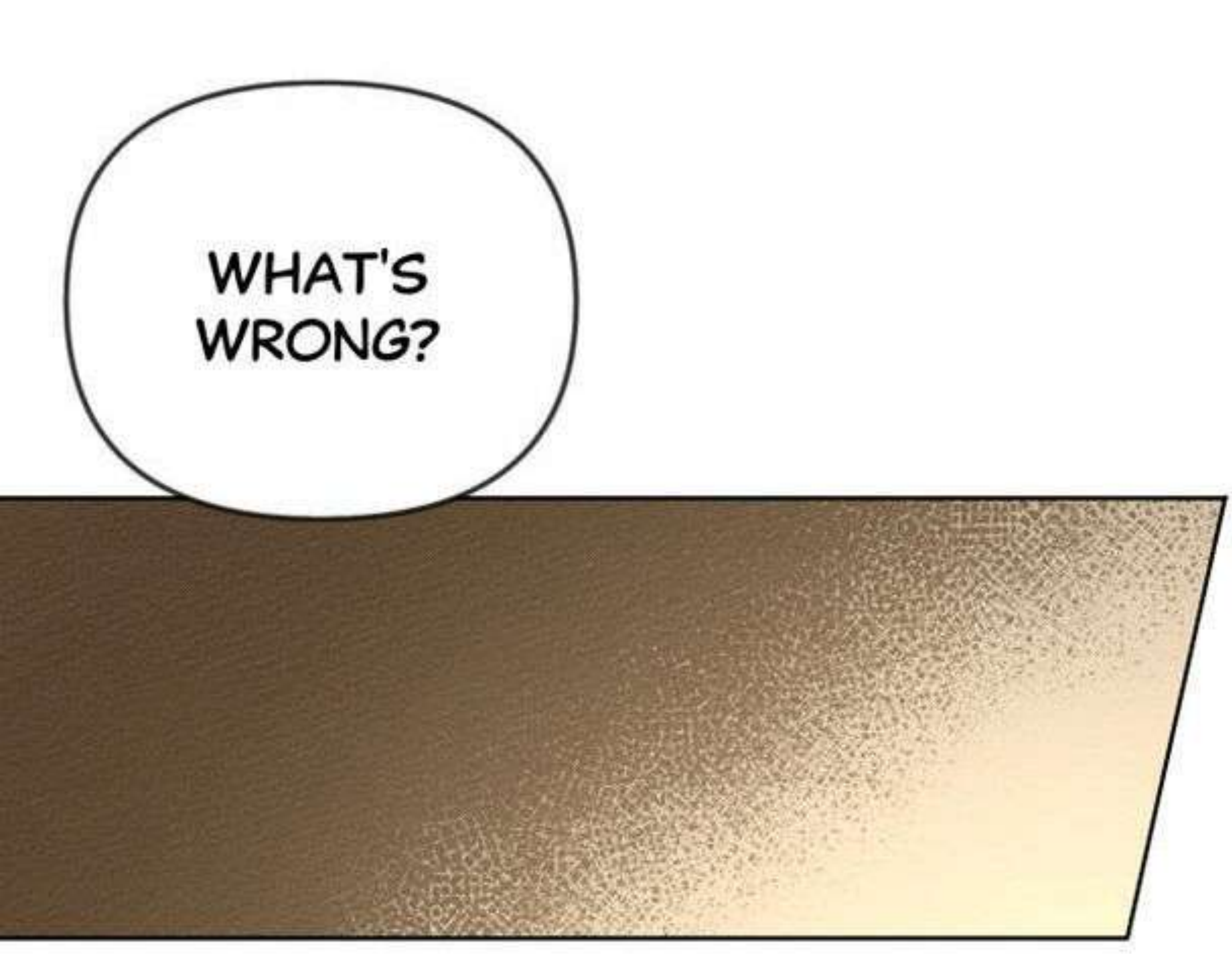

DAMN IT! ALL I DID WAS CHANGE YOUR CLOTHES!

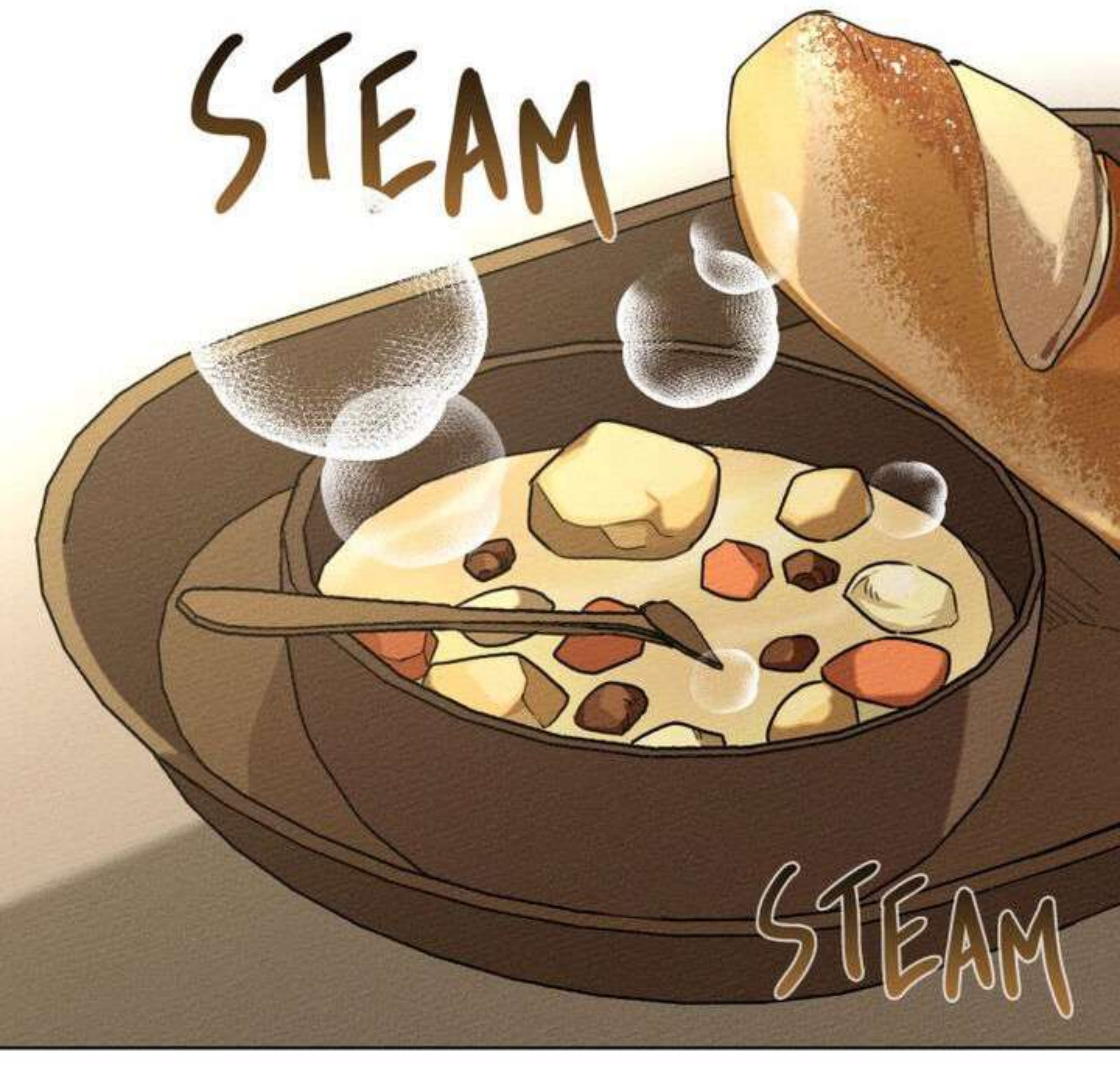

WE SPENT A NIGHT TOGETHER, ALBEIT 3 YEARS AGO.
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE FAINTED IF YOU DIDN'T WANT ME TOUCHING YOU.

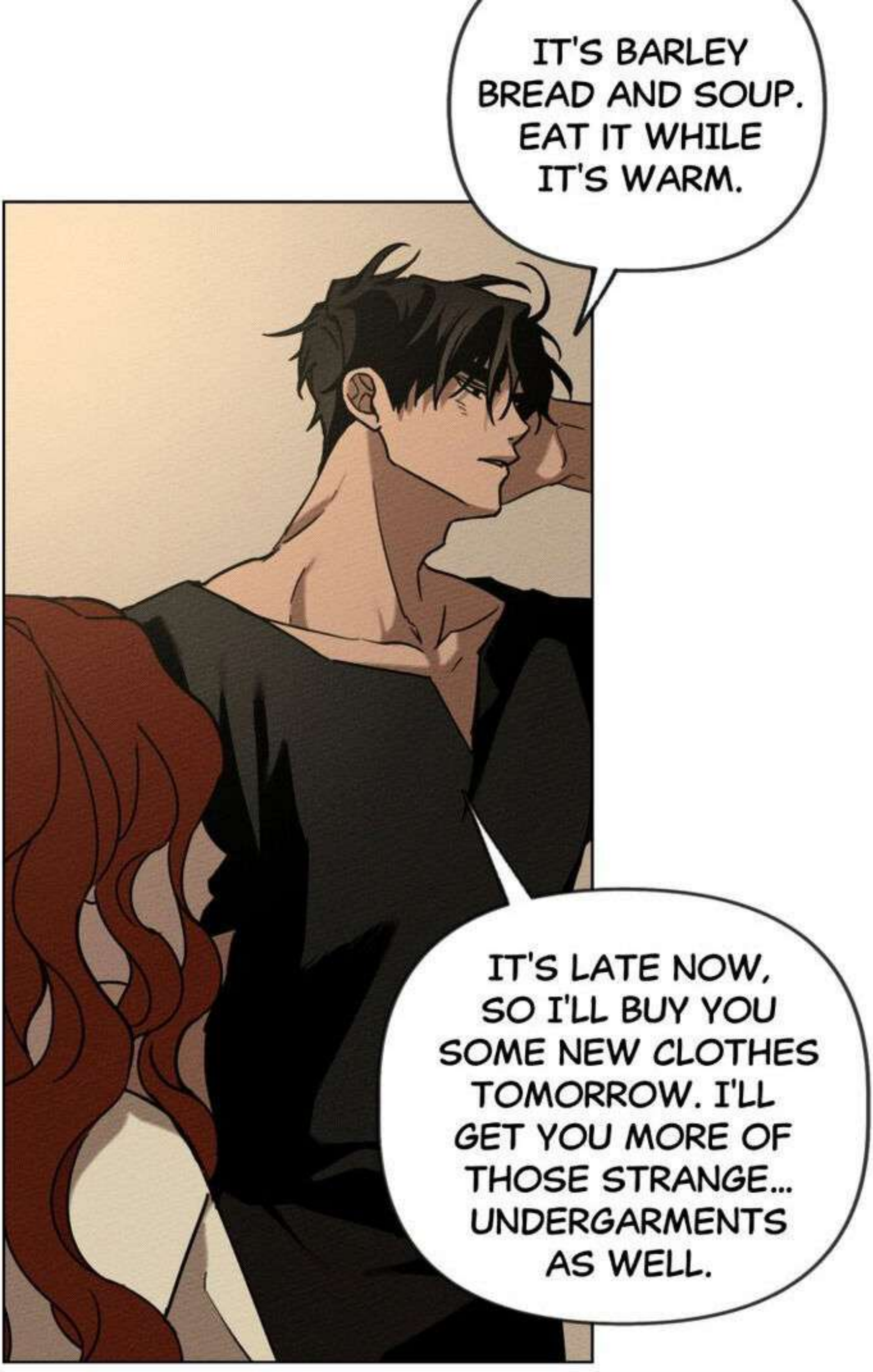

IT'S N-N-NOT THAT...

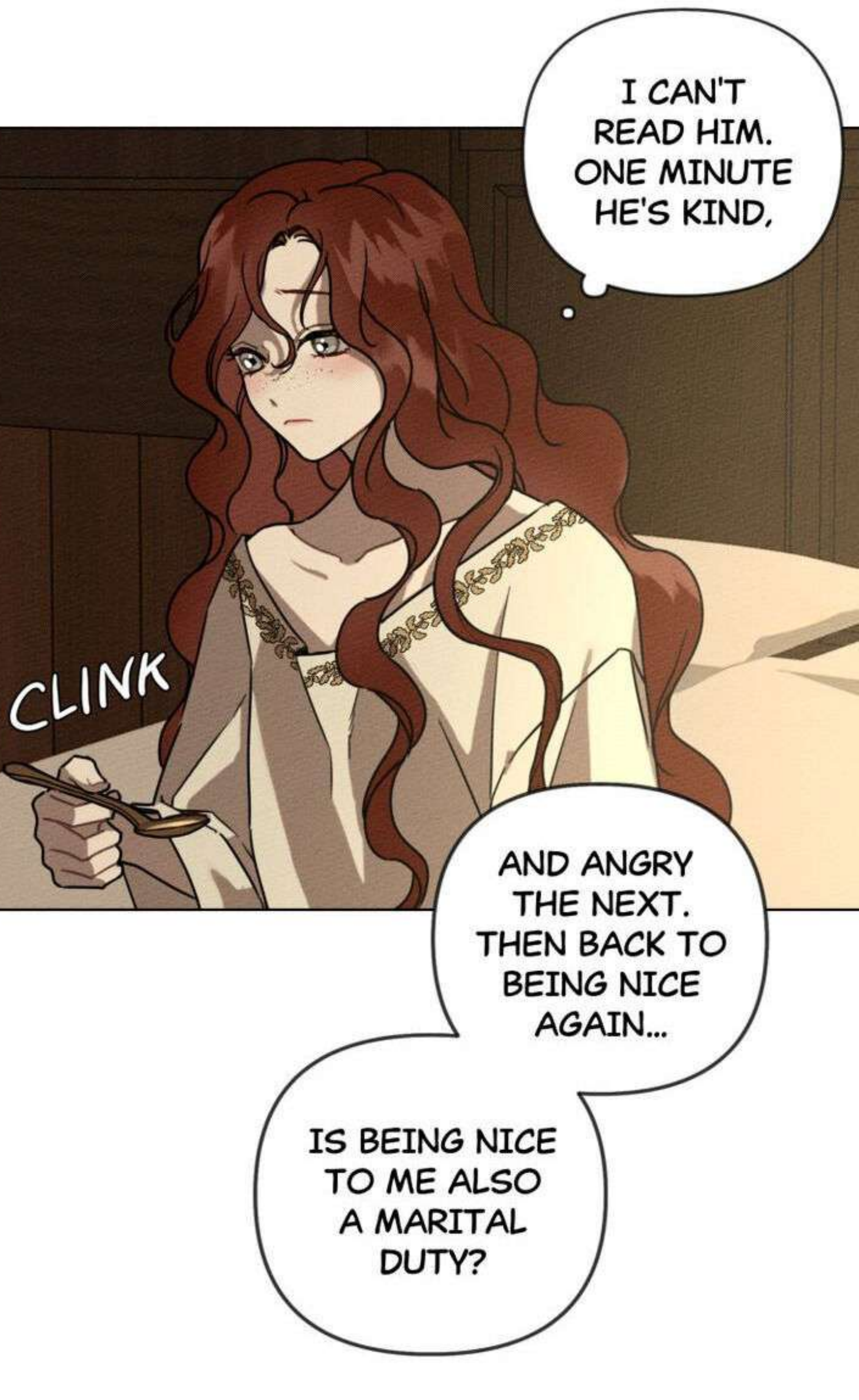

THE PROBLEM WITH NOBLE-WOMEN...
IS THAT THEY FAINT AT THE DROP OF A HAT.

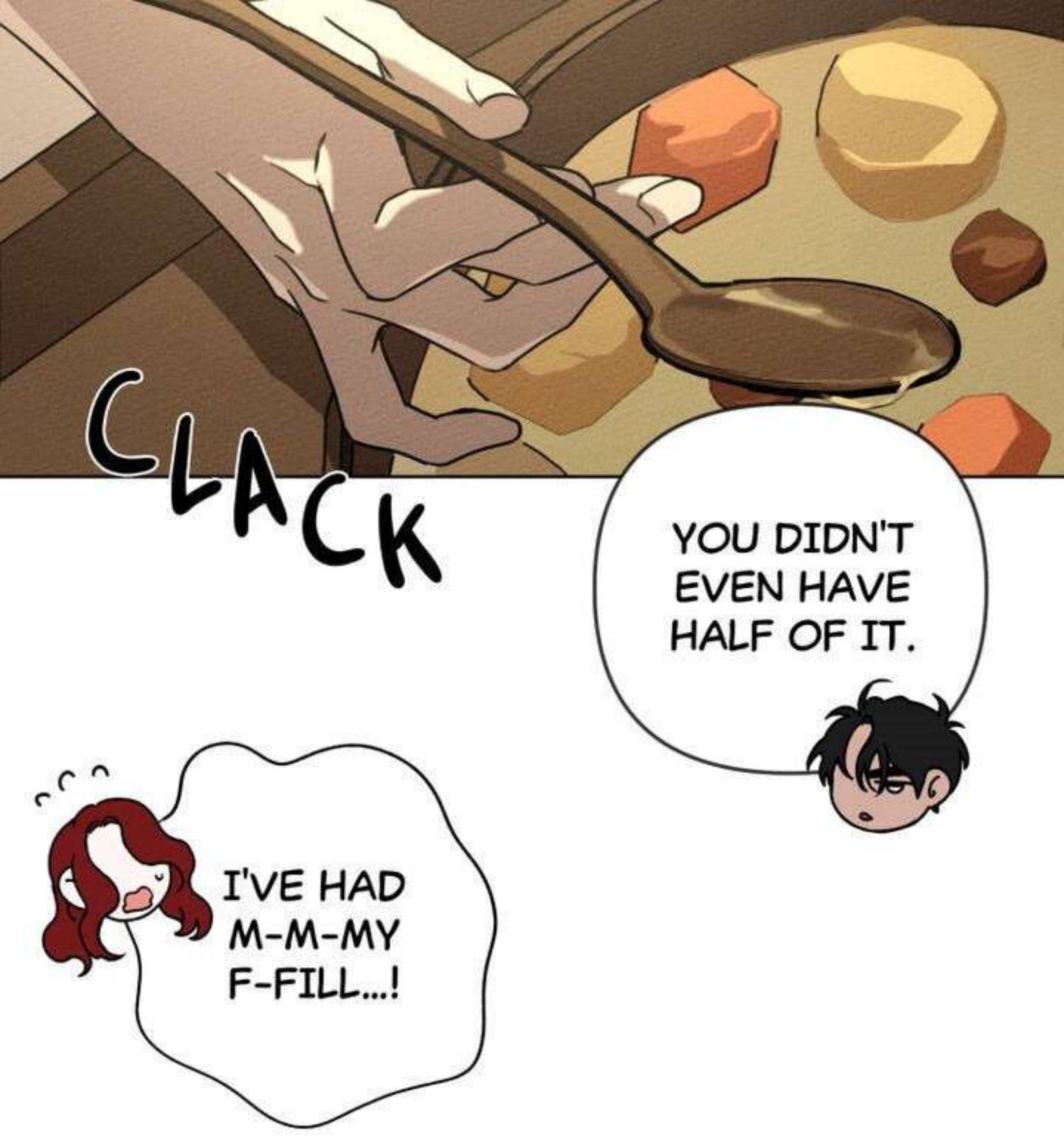

I'VE FINALLY MADE HIM ANGRY...
FAINTING AND CAUSING A DELAY... OF COURSE HE'D HATE ME.
MAYBE HE'LL ABANDON ME HERE.

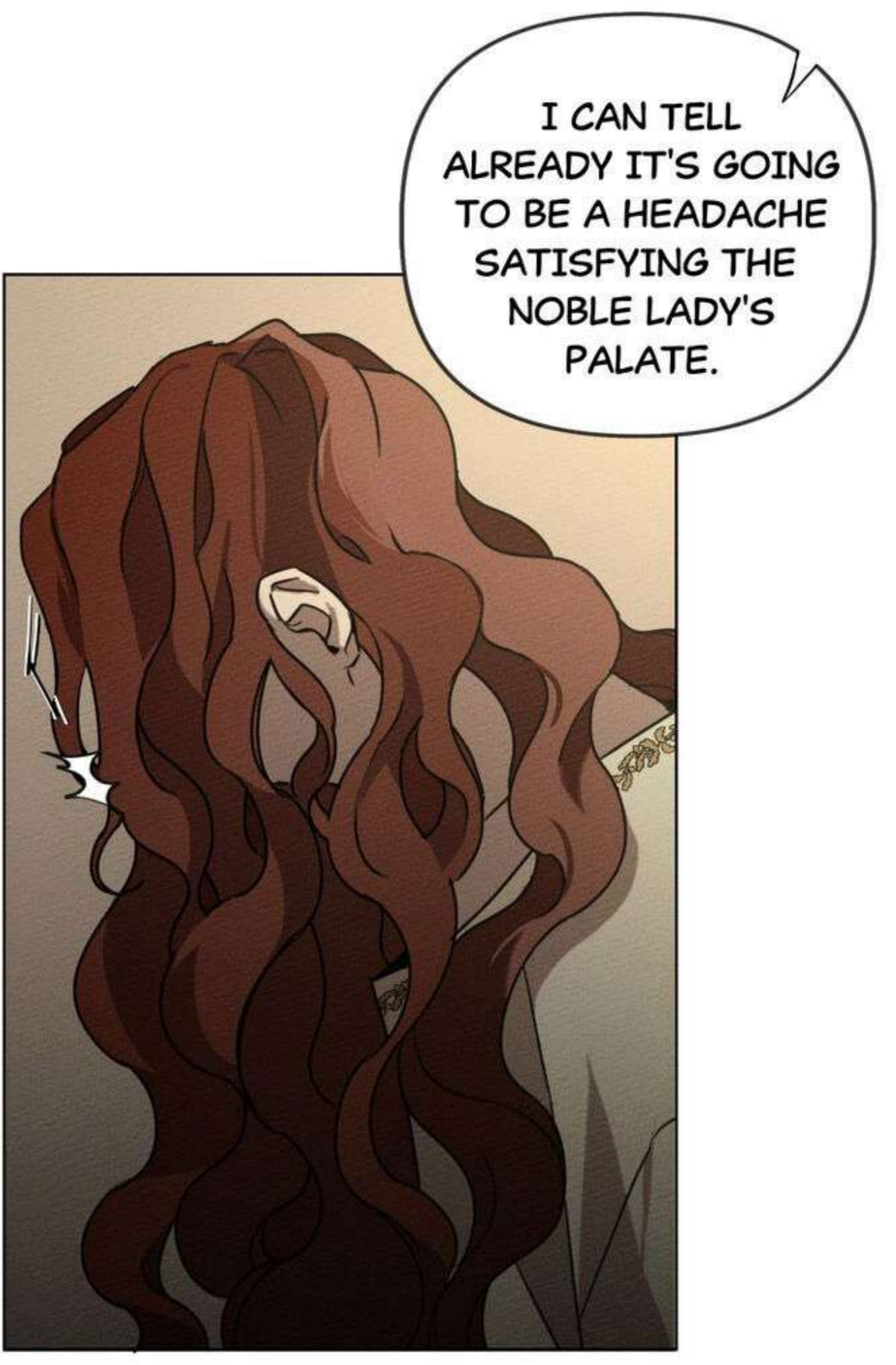

WHAT'S WRONG?


STEAM
STEAM

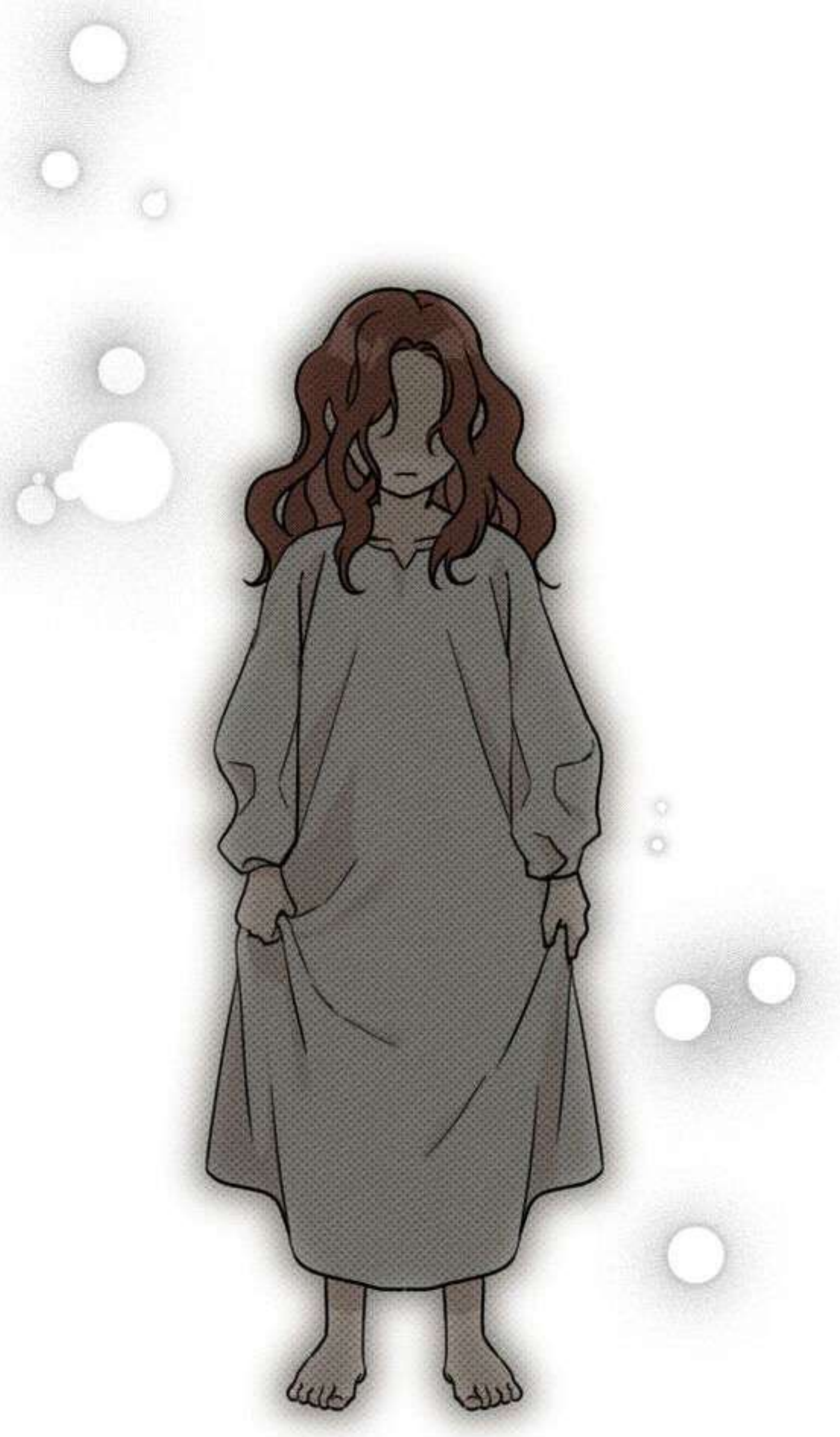

IT'S BARLEY BREAD AND SOUP. EAT IT WHILE IT'S WARM.
IT'S LATE NOW, SO I'LL BUY YOU SOME NEW CLOTHES TOMORROW. I'LL GET YOU MORE OF THOSE STRANGE... UNDERGARMENTS AS WELL.


I CAN'T READ HIM. ONE MINUTE HE'S KIND,
CLINK
AND ANGRY THE NEXT. THEN BACK TO BEING NICE AGAIN...
IS BEING NICE TO ME ALSO A MARITAL DUTY?


CLACK
YOU DIDN'T EVEN HAVE HALF OF IT.
I'VE HAD M-M-MY F-FILL...!

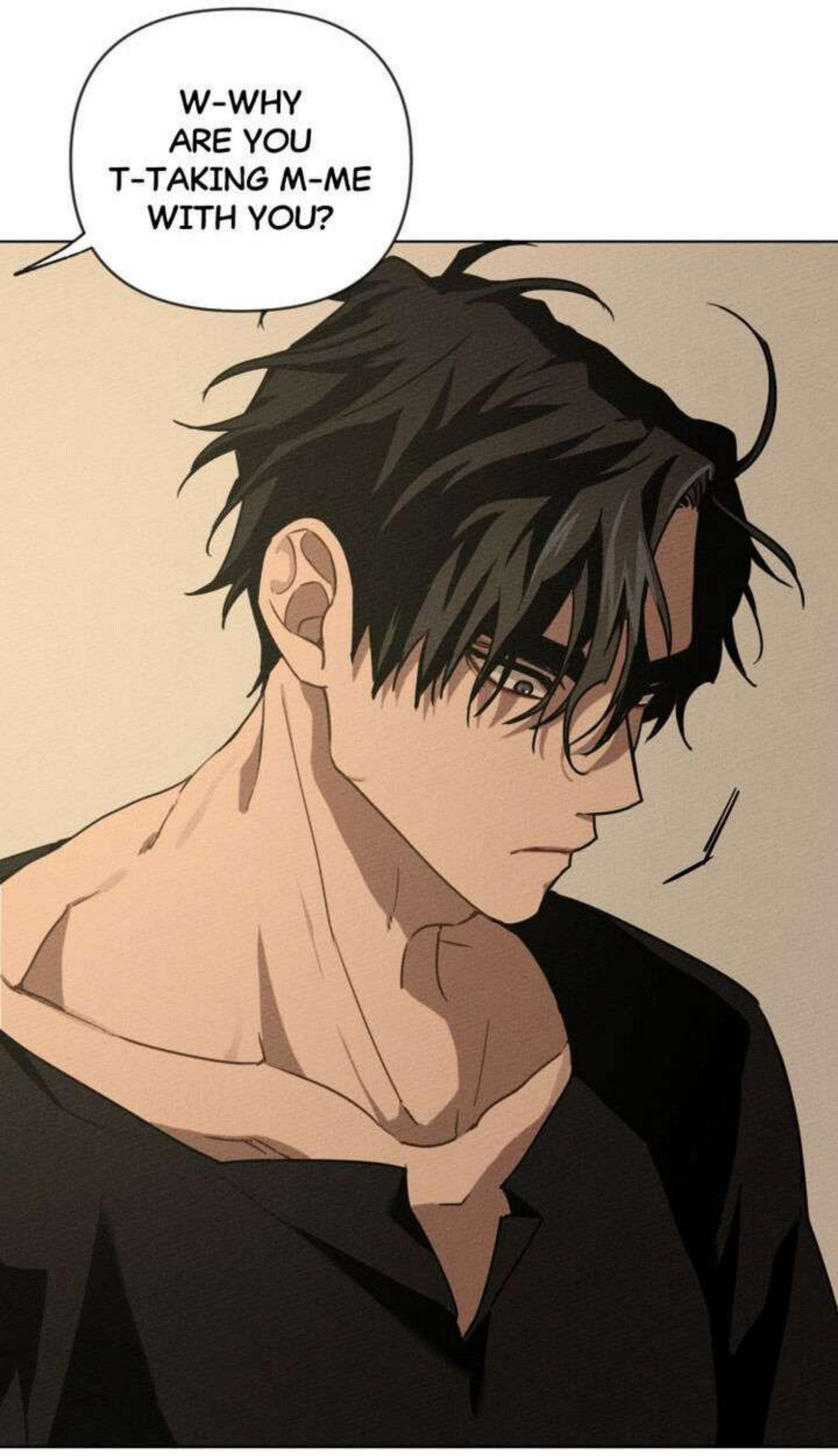

I CAN TELL ALREADY IT'S GOING TO BE A HEADACHE SATISFYING THE NOBLE LADY'S PALATE.

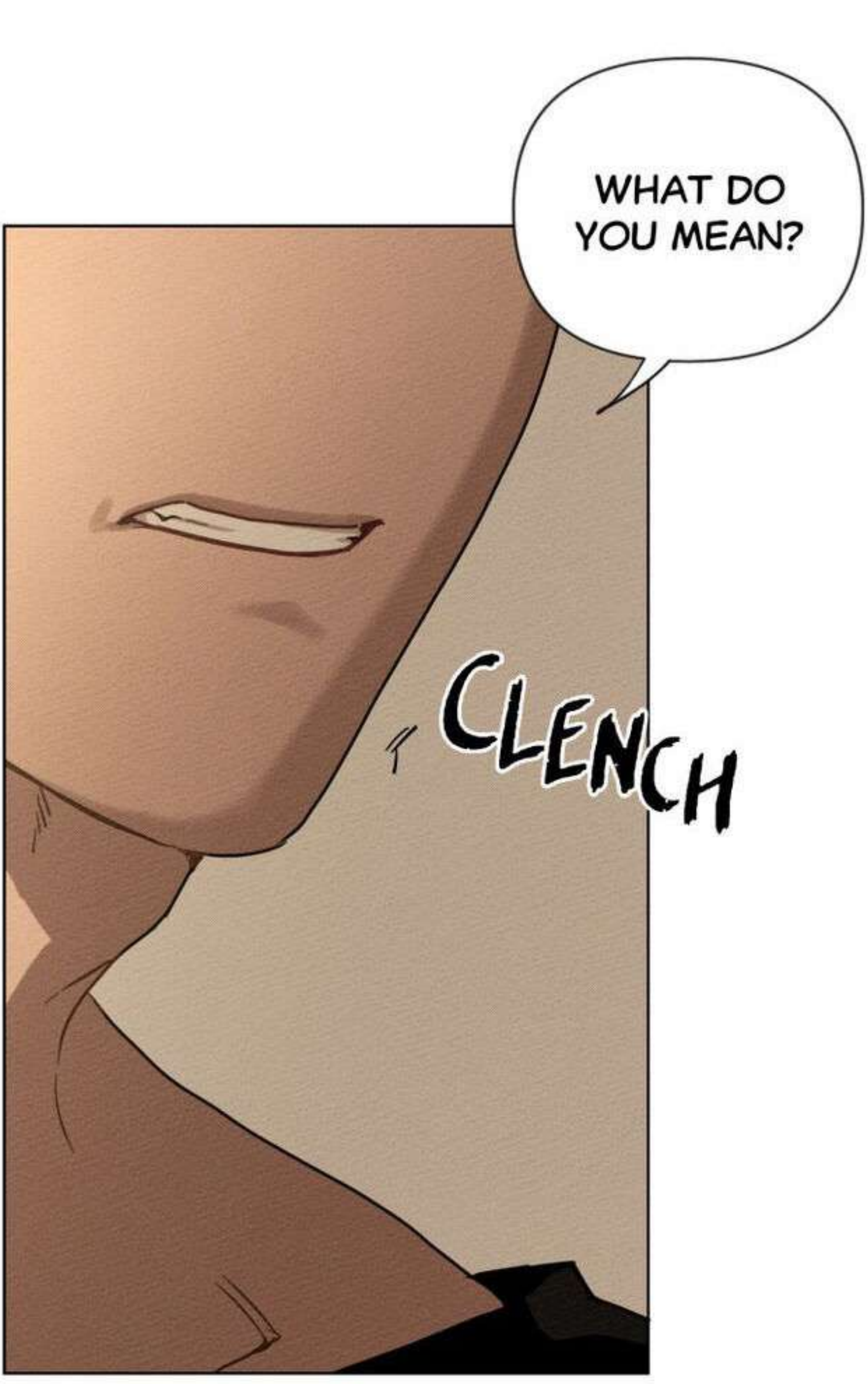
I BET HE SECRETLY REGRETS BRINGING ME WITH HIM.



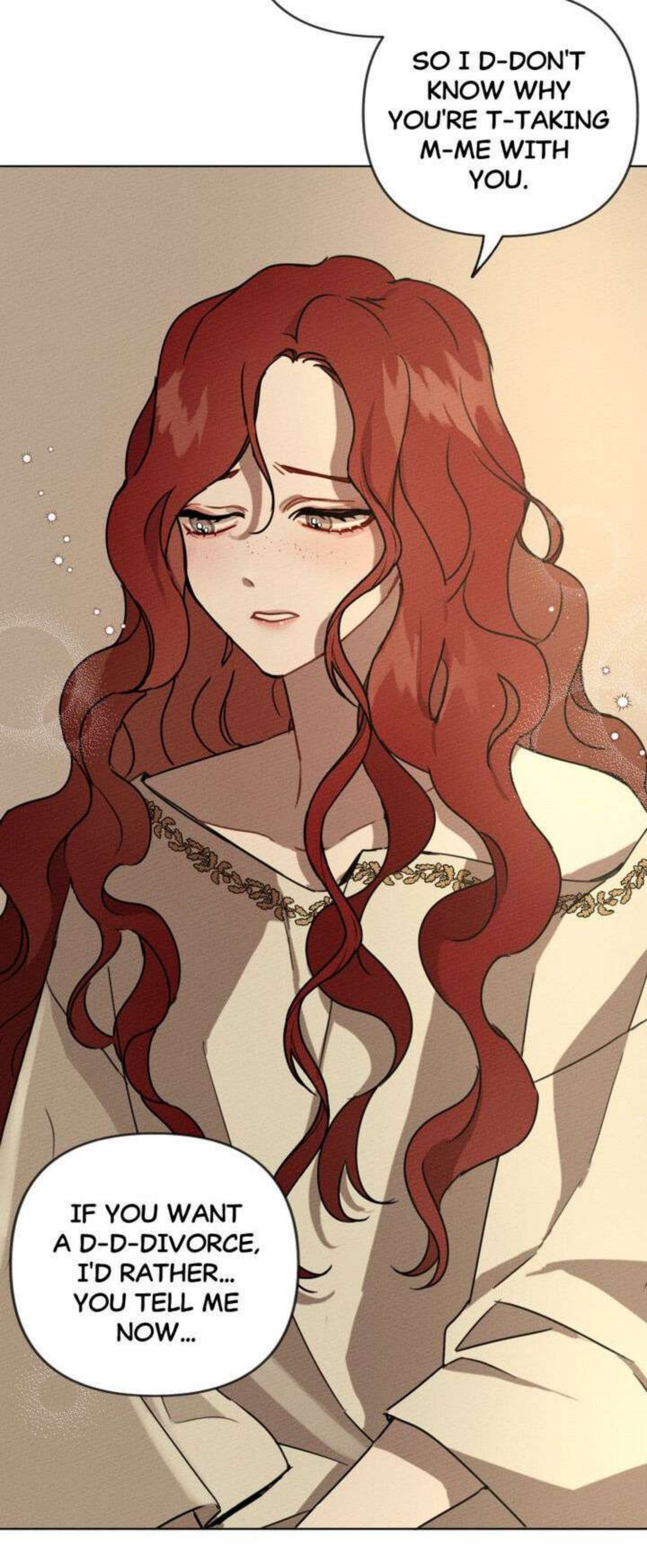
NOBODY EVER WANTS ME, AFTER ALL.

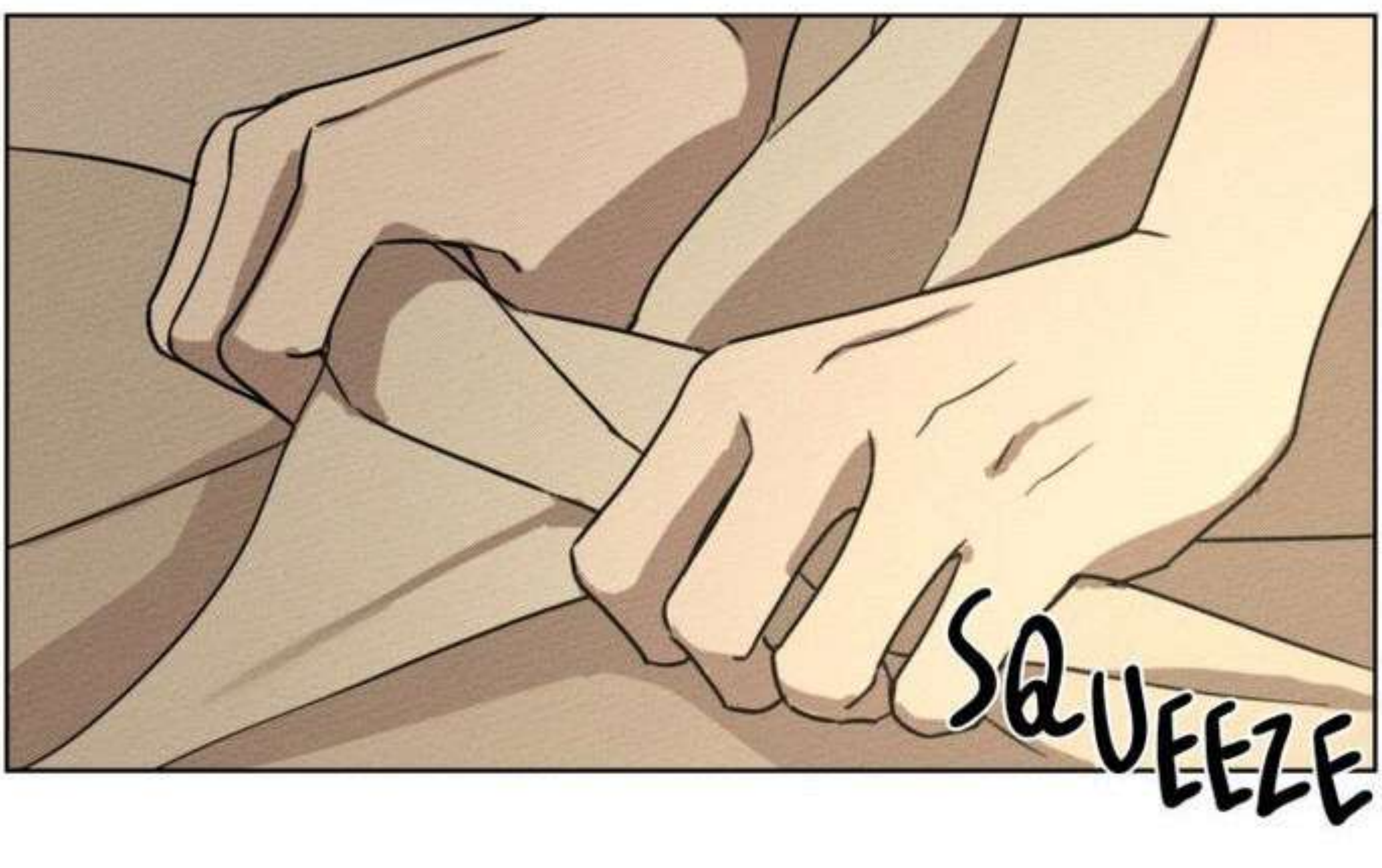
NO ONE...

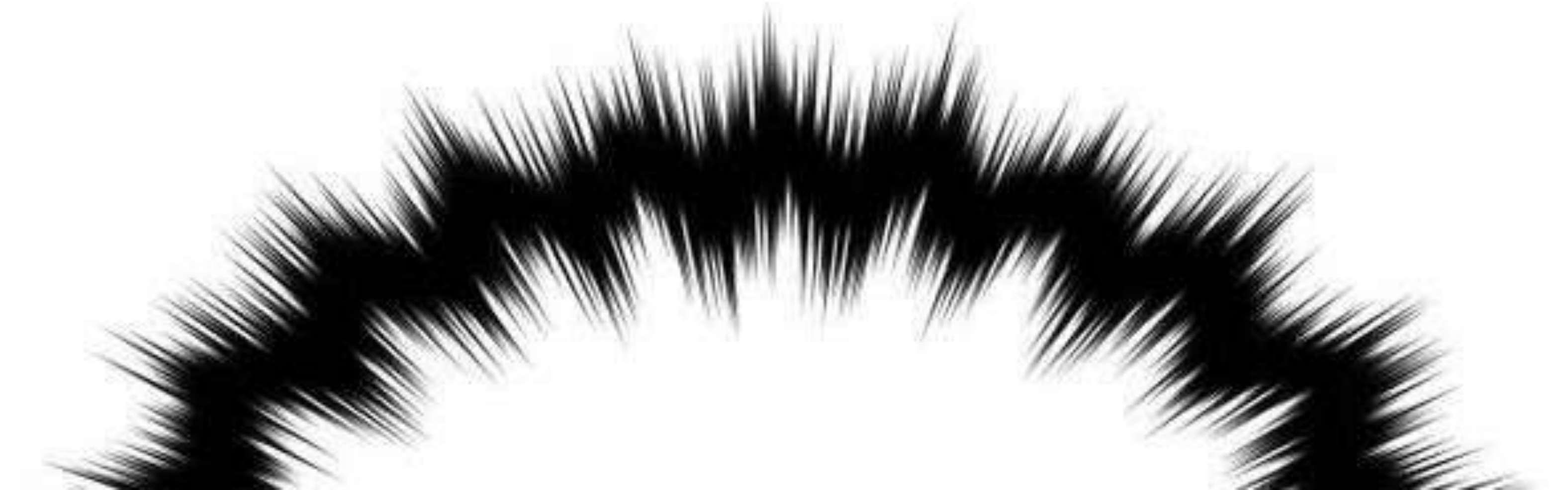

W-WHY ARE YOU T-TAKING M-ME WITH YOU?


WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
CLENCH

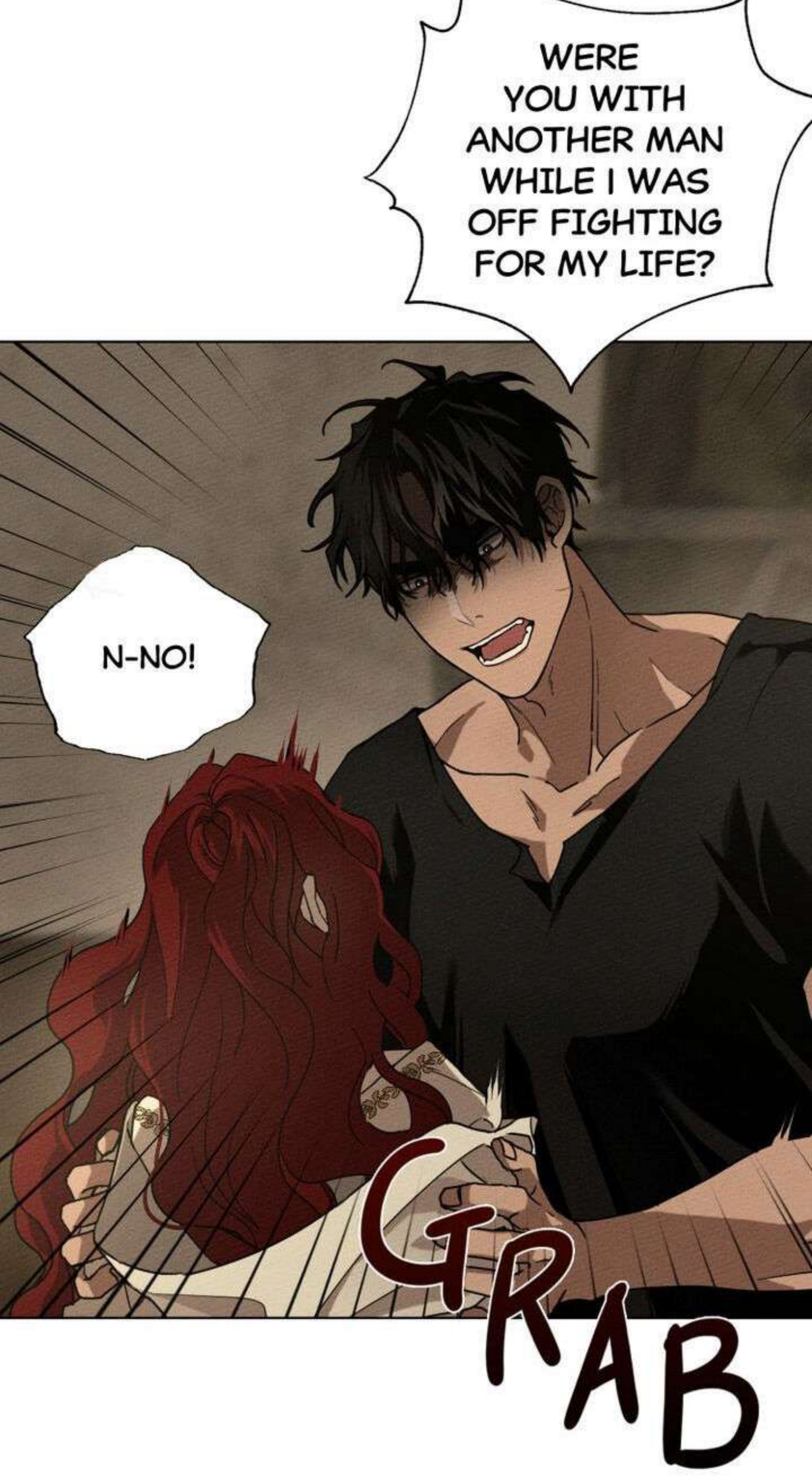
I KNOW YOU D-DIDN'T WANT TO M-MARRY M-M-ME.

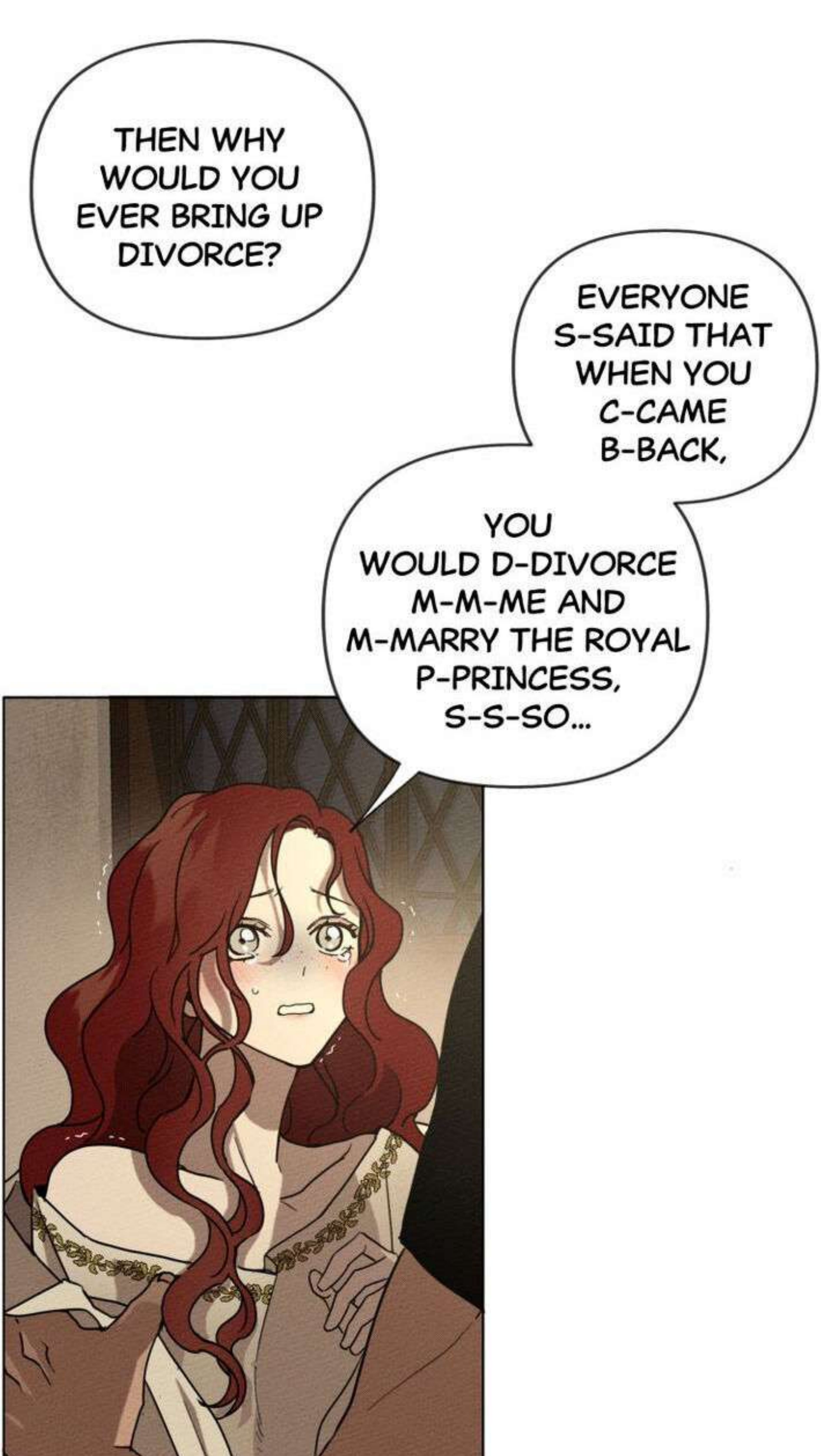

SO I D-DON'T KNOW WHY YOU'RE T-TAKING M-ME WITH YOU.
IF YOU WANT A D-D-DIVORCE, I'D RATHER... YOU TELL ME NOW...


SQUEEZE

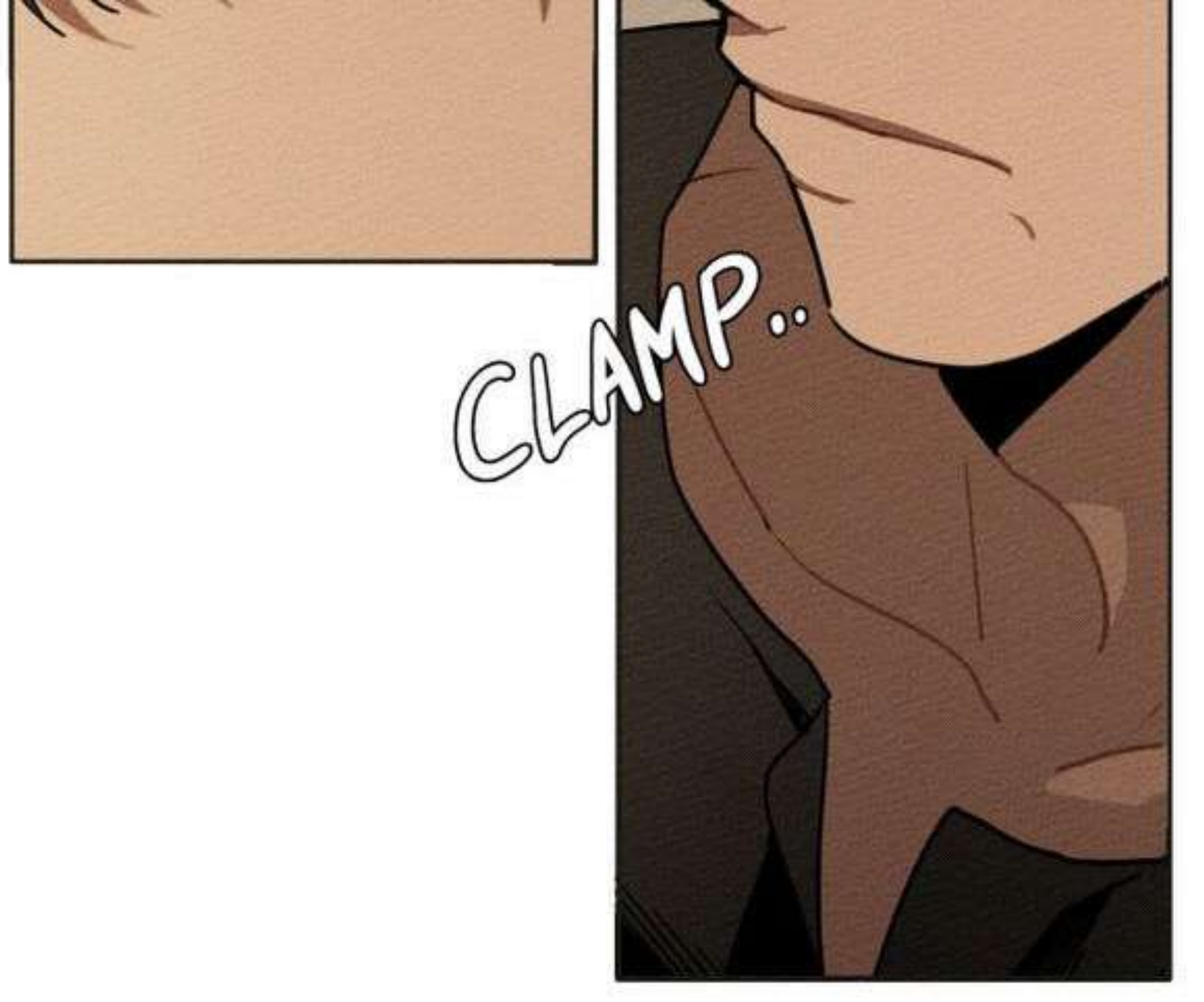


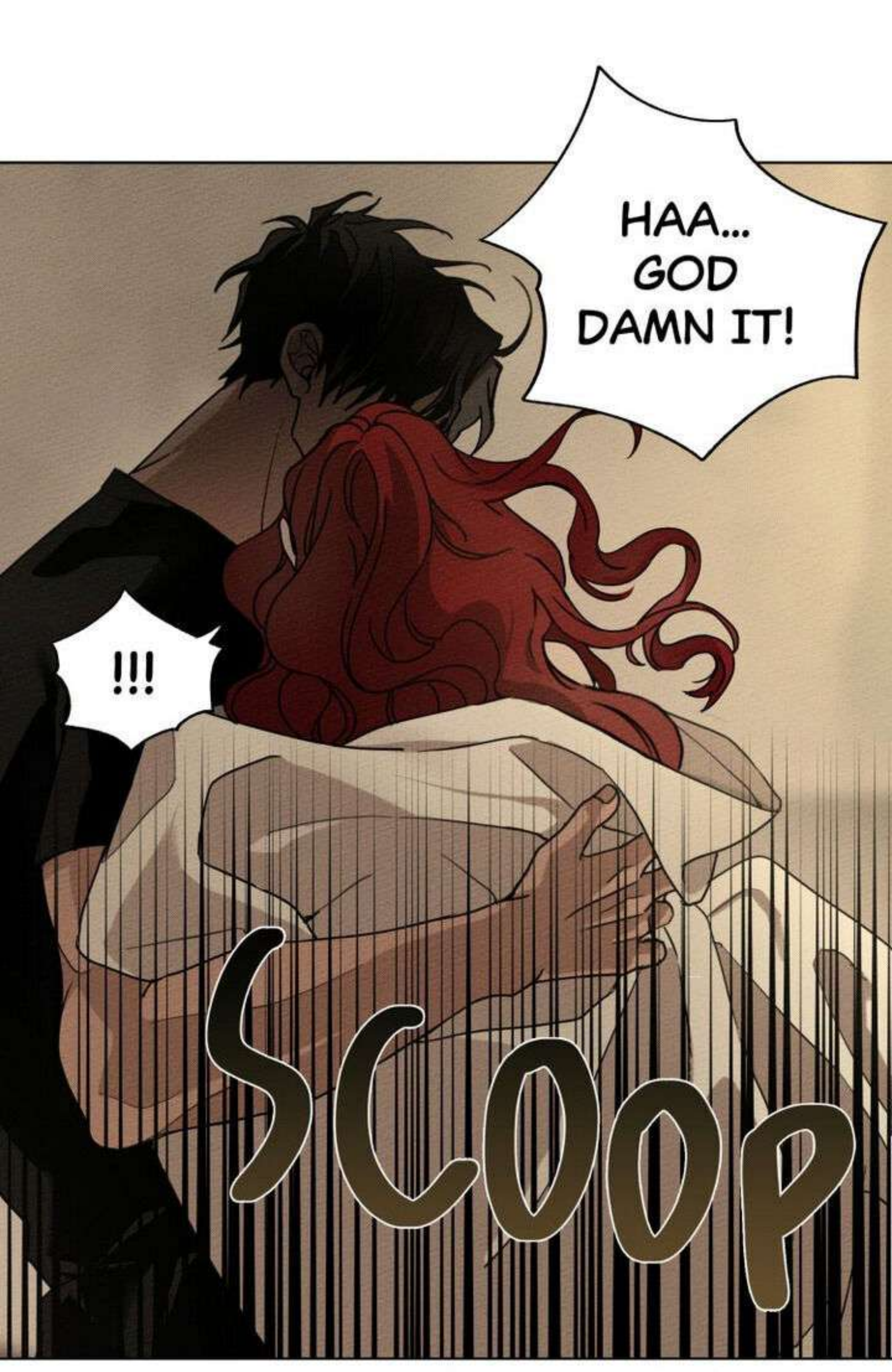
IF YOU'RE GOING TO ABANDON ME, DO IT WHILE I CAN STILL GO BACK...
...DID YOU JUST SAY *DIVORCE*?

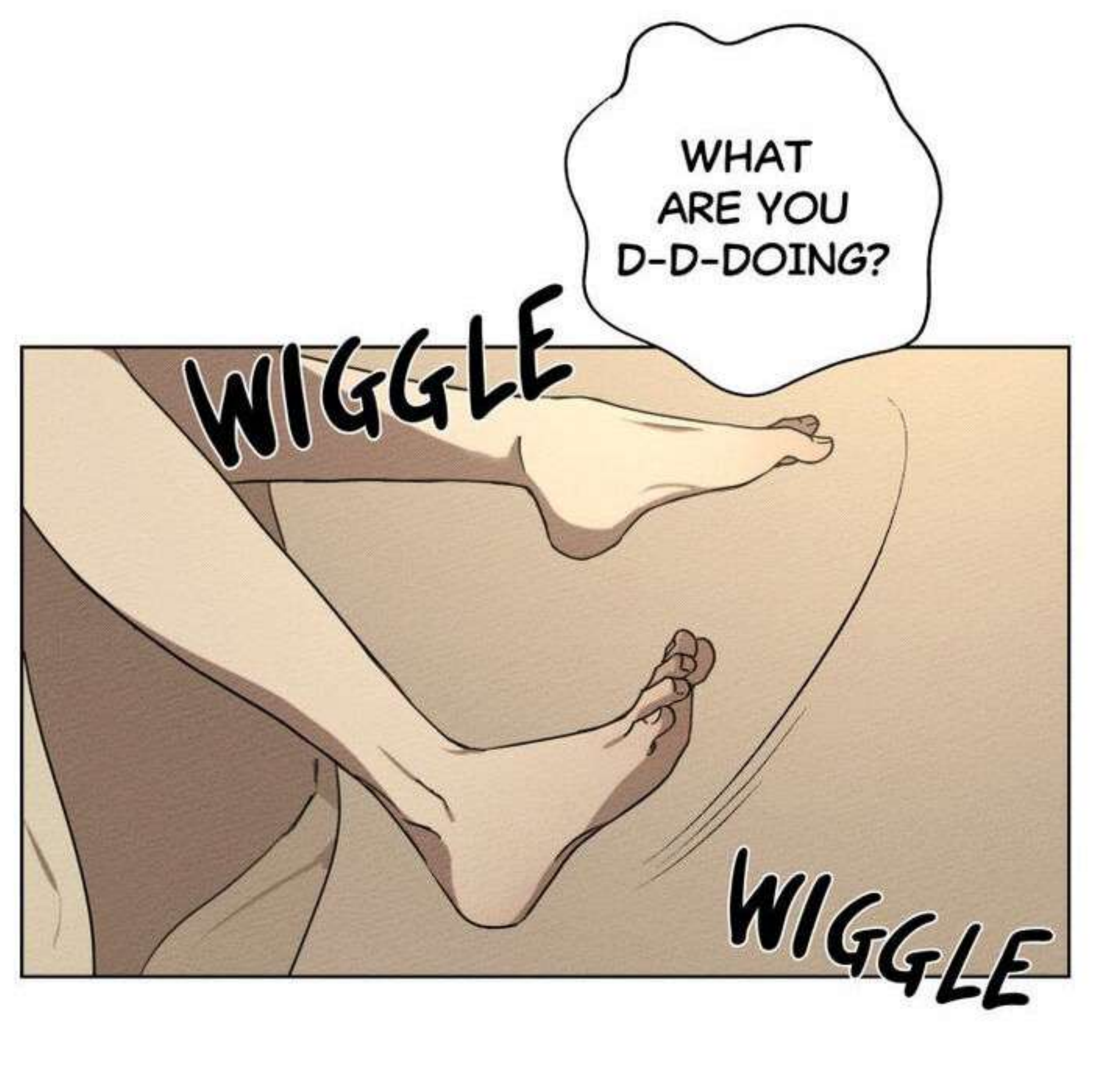

WERE YOU WITH ANOTHER MAN WHILE I WAS OFF FIGHTING FOR MY LIFE?
N-NO!
GRAB

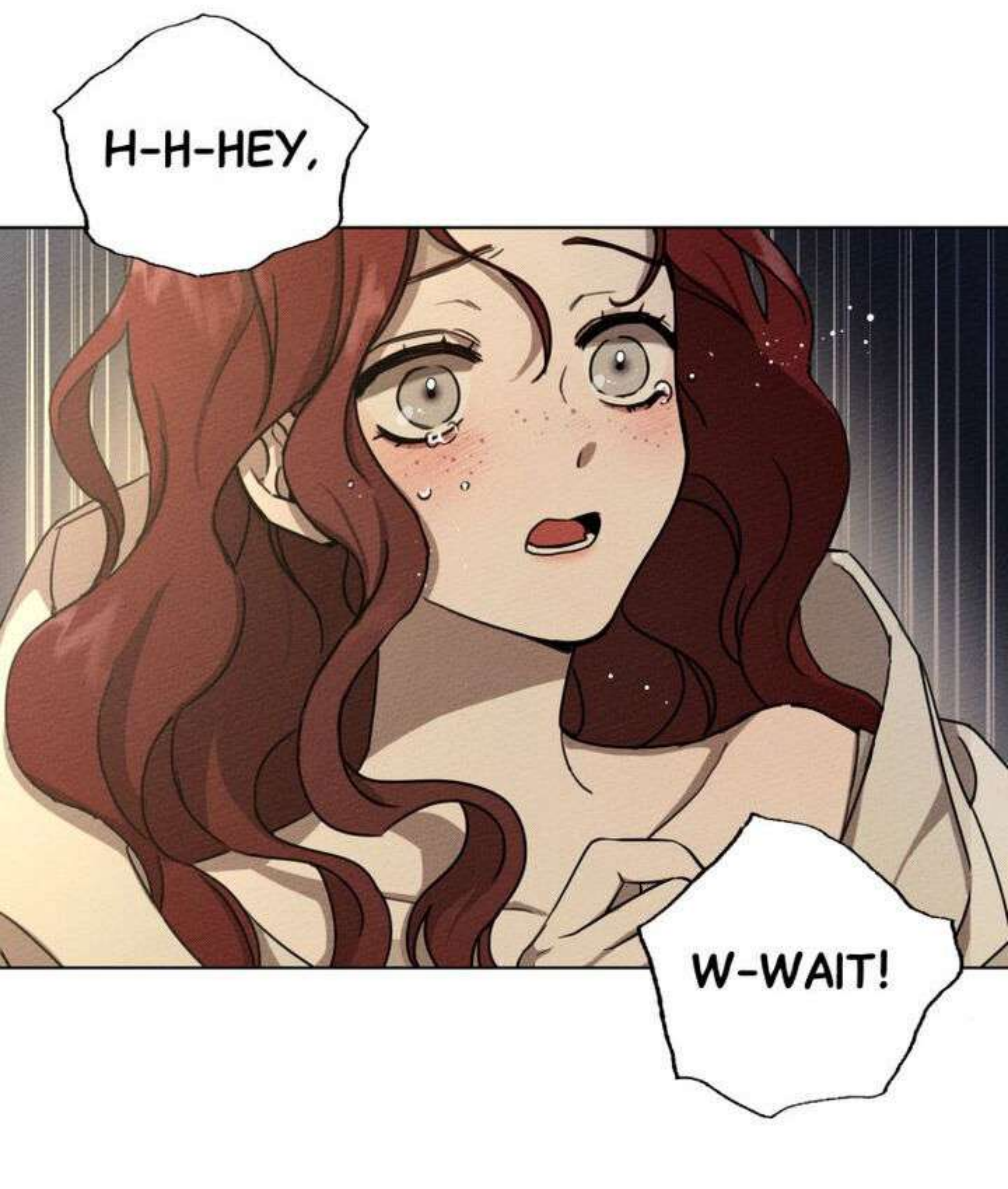

THEN WHY WOULD YOU EVER BRING UP DIVORCE?
EVERYONE S-SAID THAT WHEN YOU C-CAME B-BACK,
YOU WOULD D-DIVORCE M-M-ME AND M-MARRY THE ROYAL P-PRINCESS, S-S-SO...

I'M HOPELESS. I'VE ONLY MADE HIM ANGRIER. NOW I'M...
DRIP DROP




HAA... GOD DAMN IT!
!!!
SCOOP


WHAT ARE YOU D-D-DOING?
WIGGLE
WIGGLE


H-H-HEY,
W-WAIT!

ASSISTANCE INTOL
K_Din
Yemin

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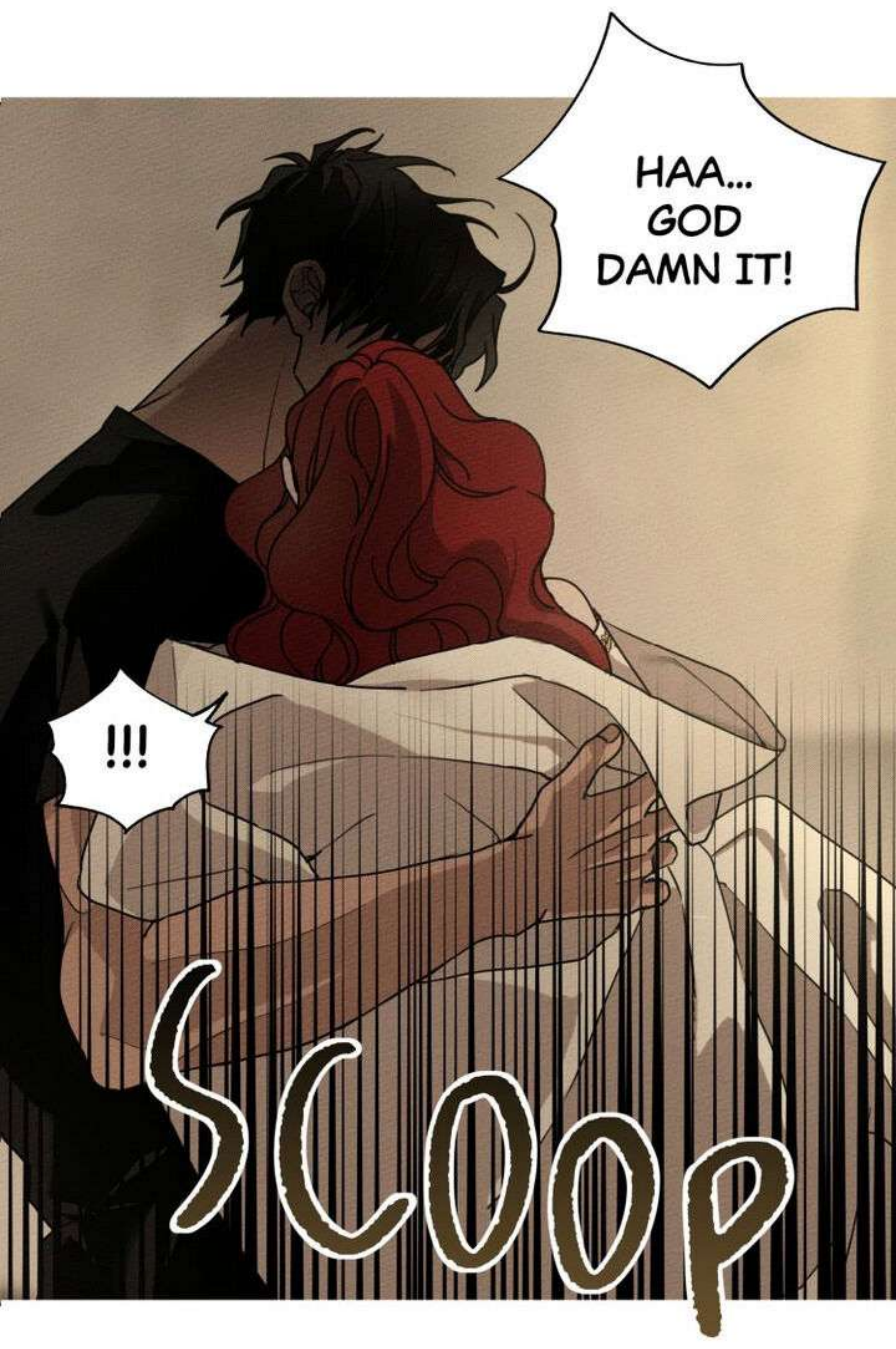
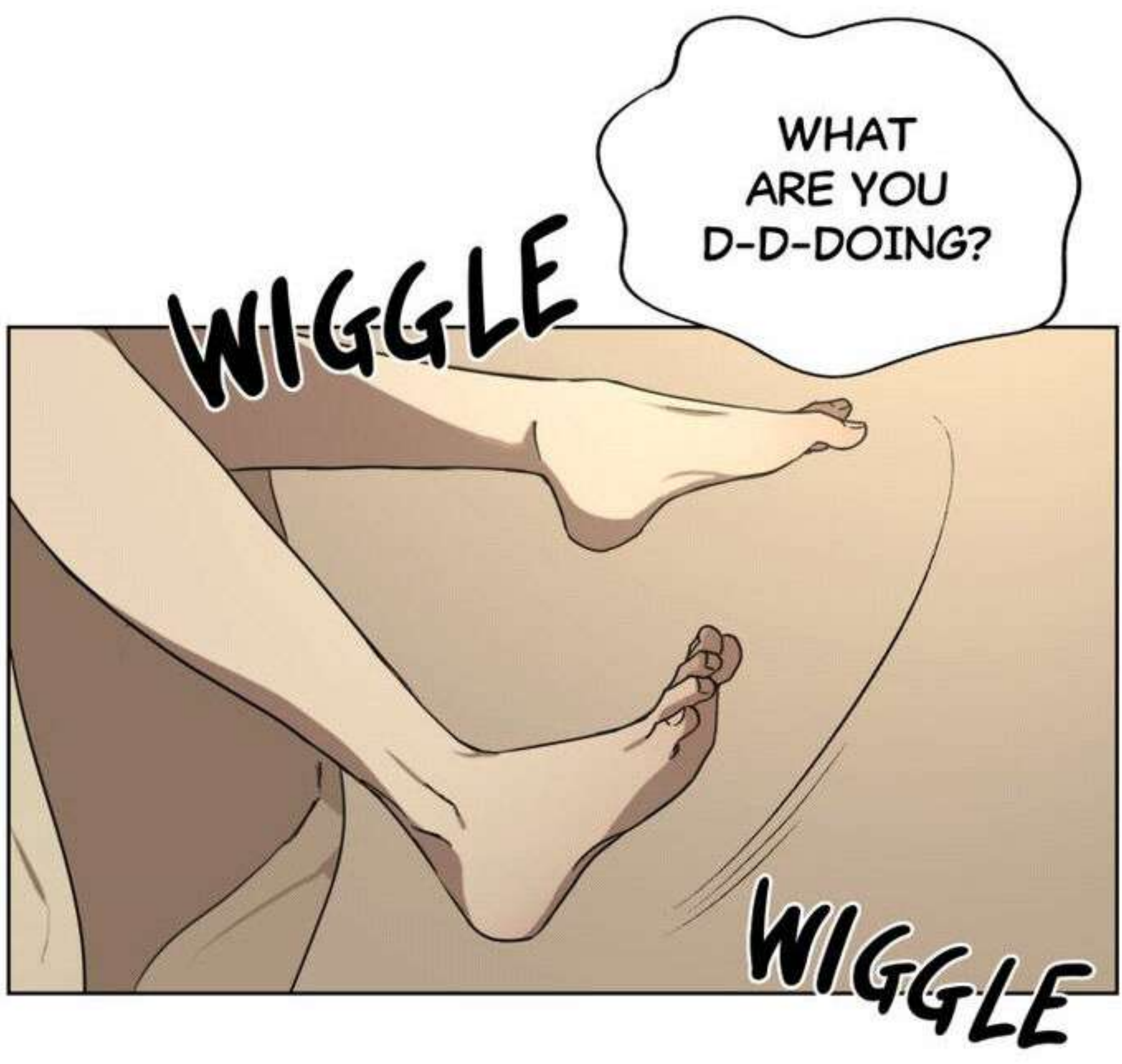
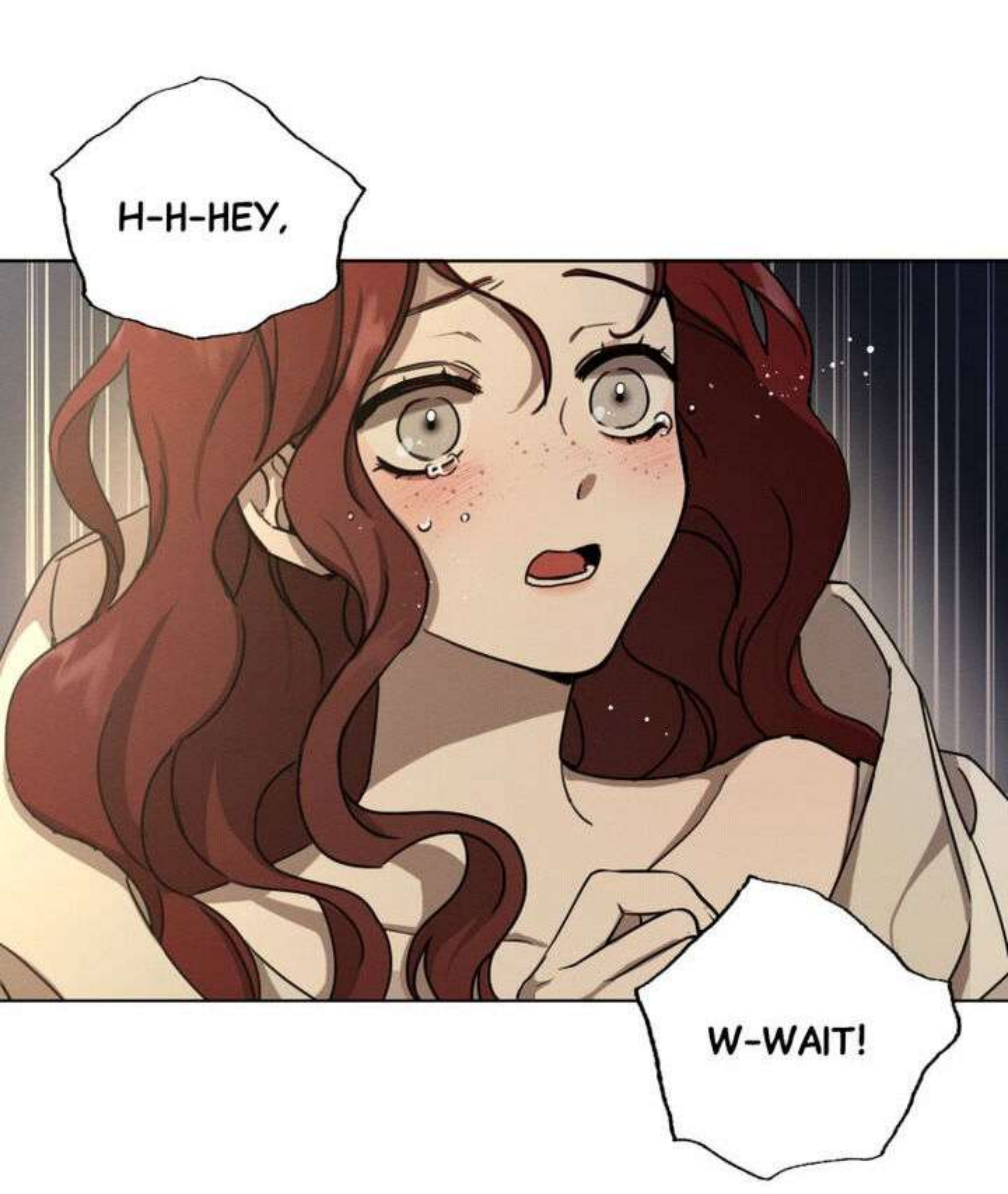

HAA... GOD DAMN IT!
!!!
SCOOP

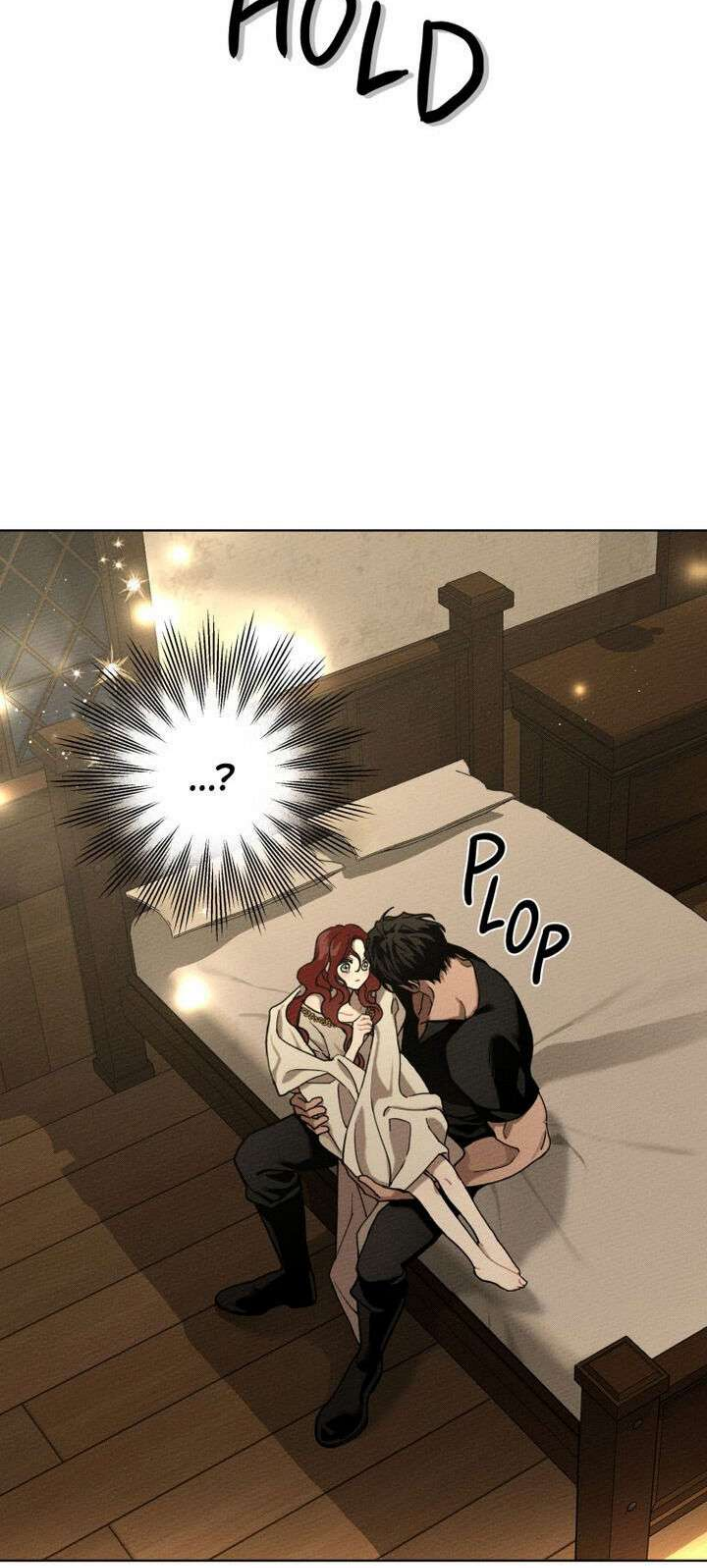

WHAT ARE YOU D-D-DOING?
WIGGLE
WIGGLE

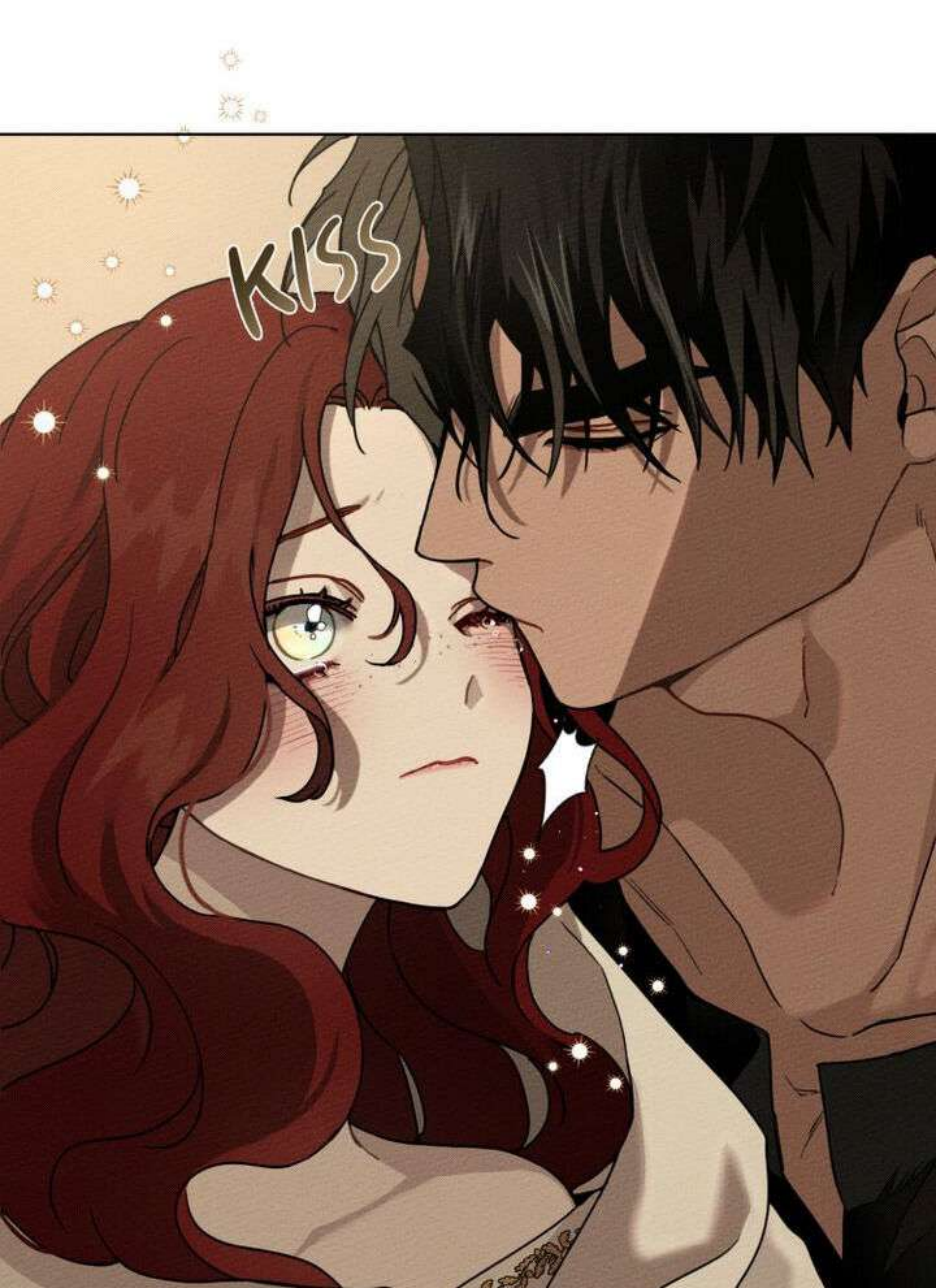

H-H-HEY,
W-WAIT!

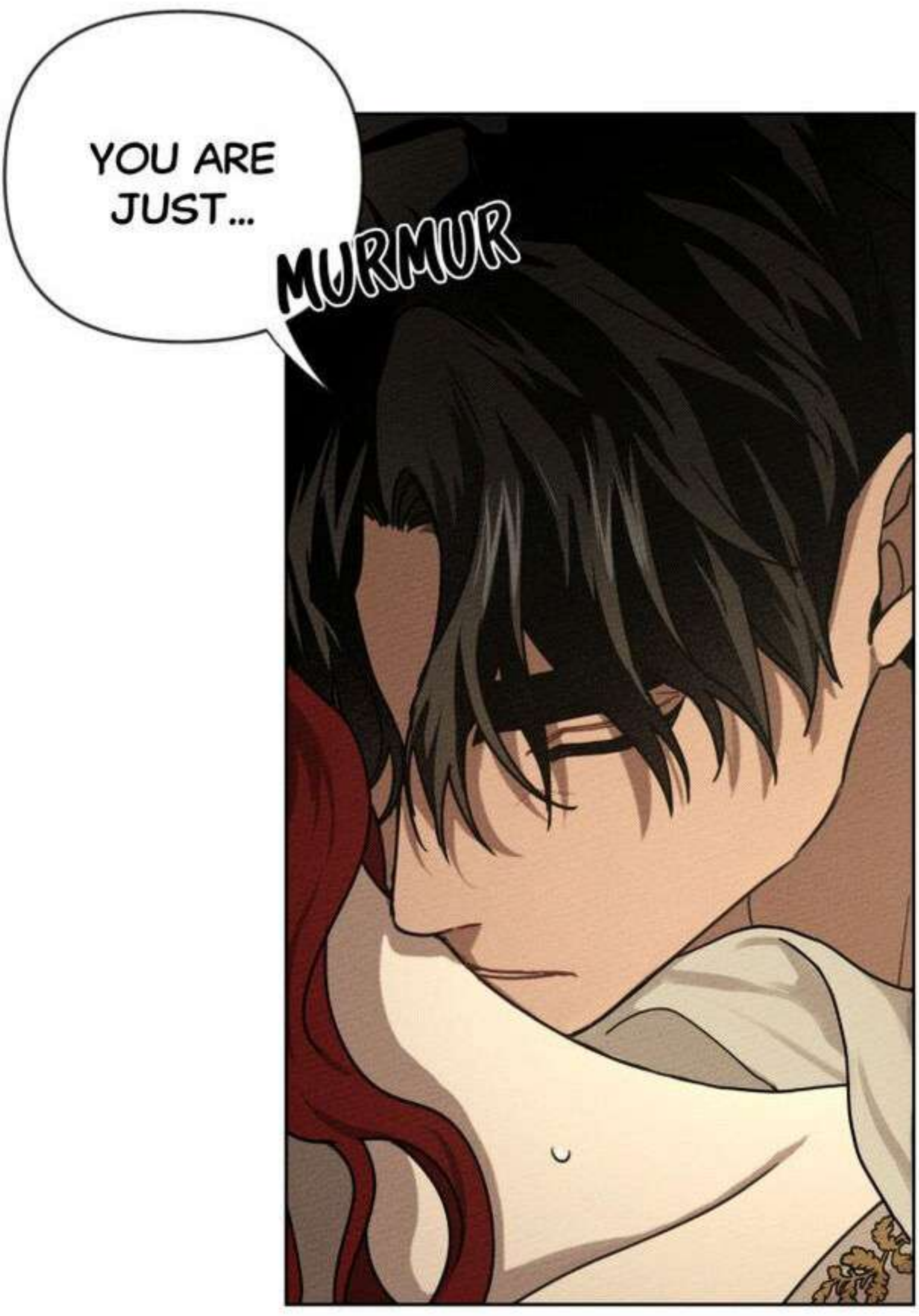
Under the Oak Tree

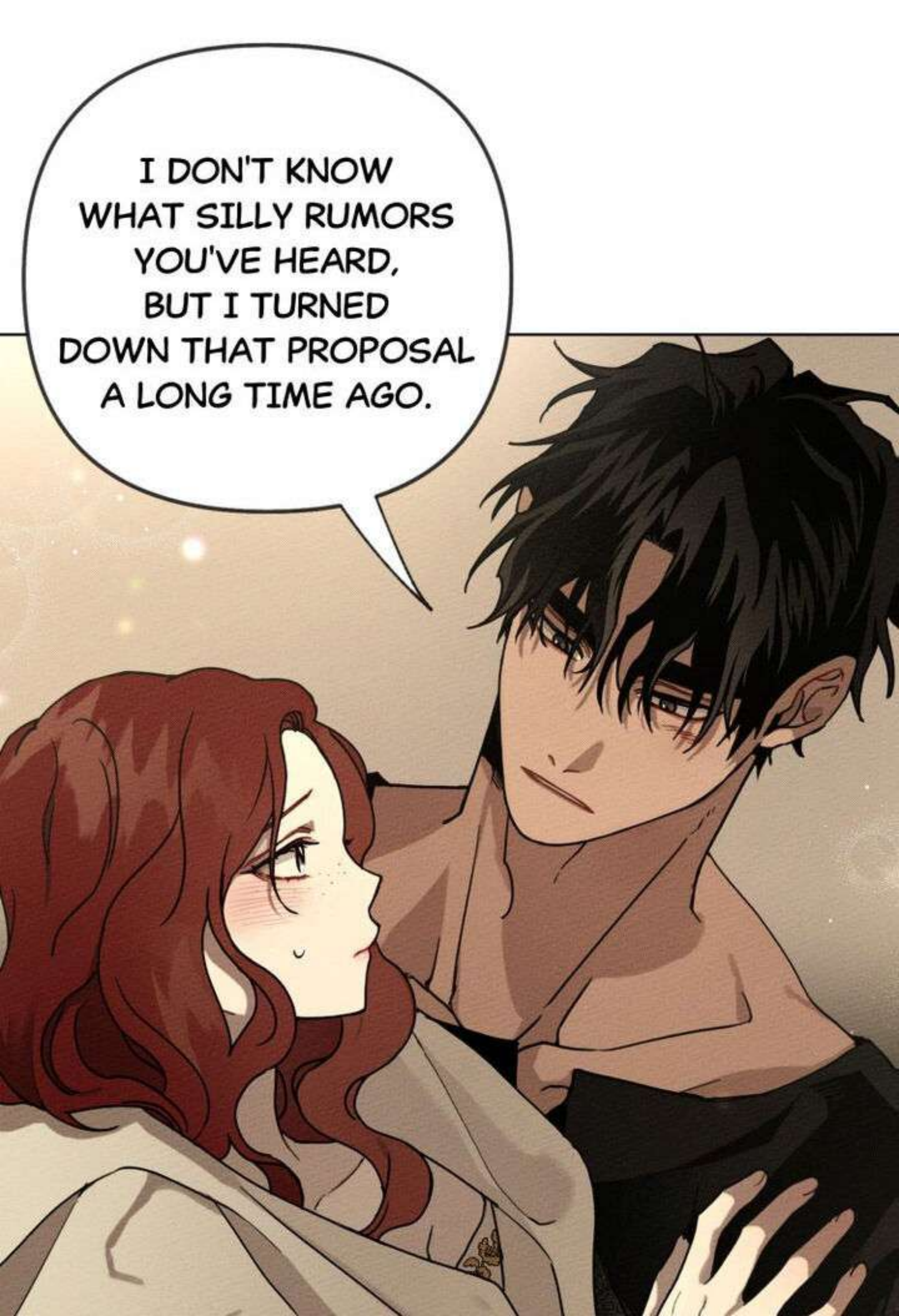
ILLUSTRATION P • ADAPTED BY namu • WRITER Kim Suji

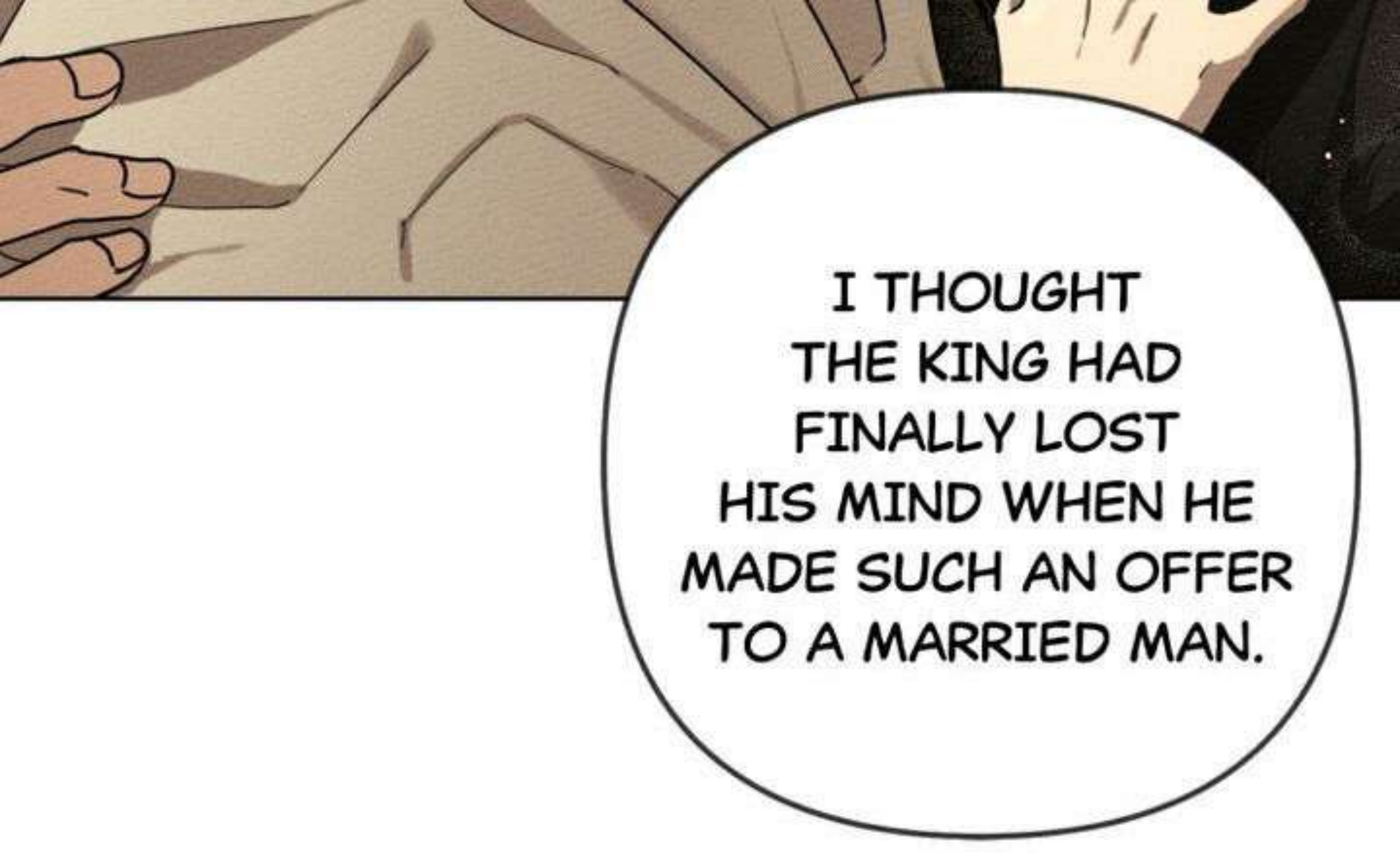
5

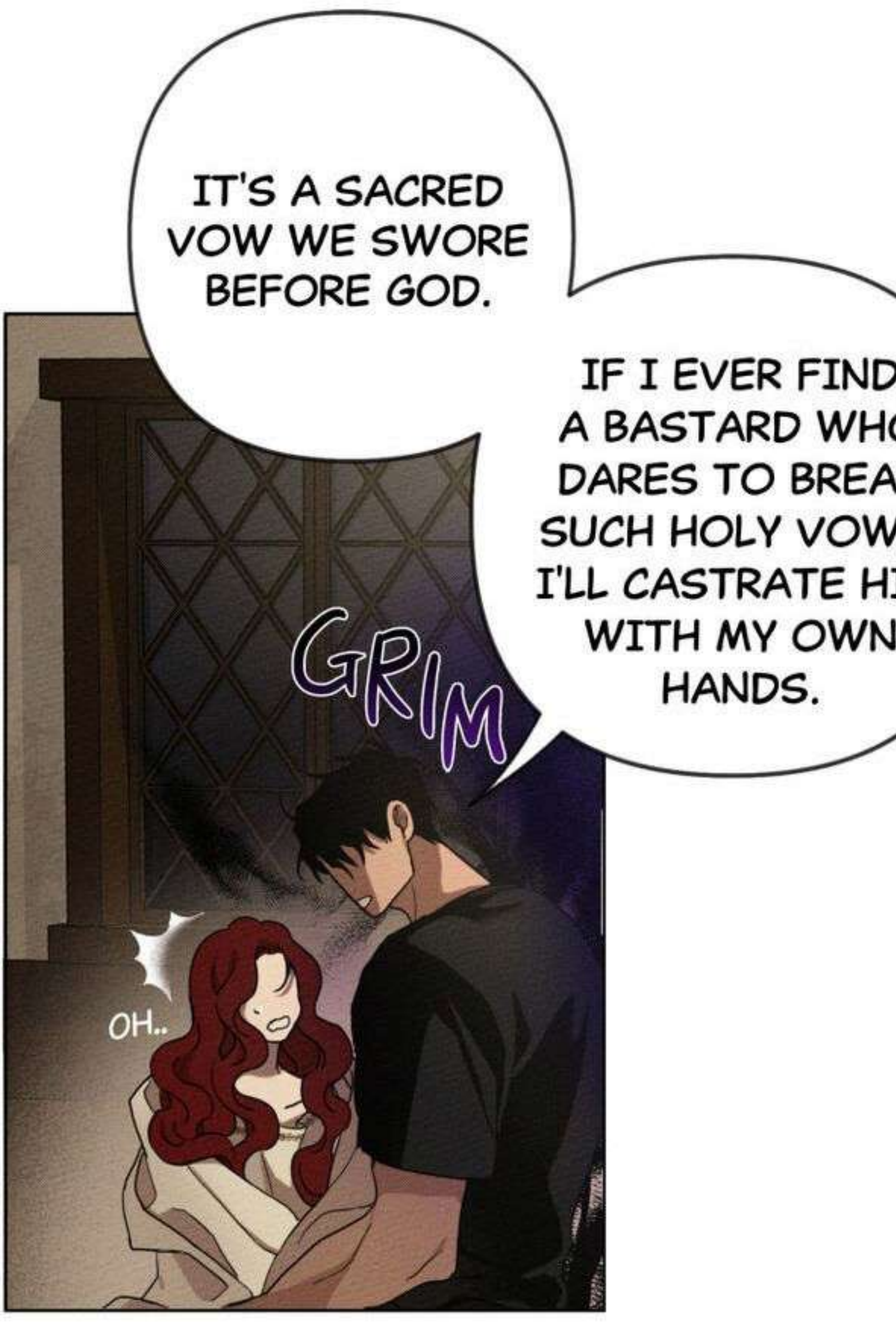

HOLD
...?
PLOP

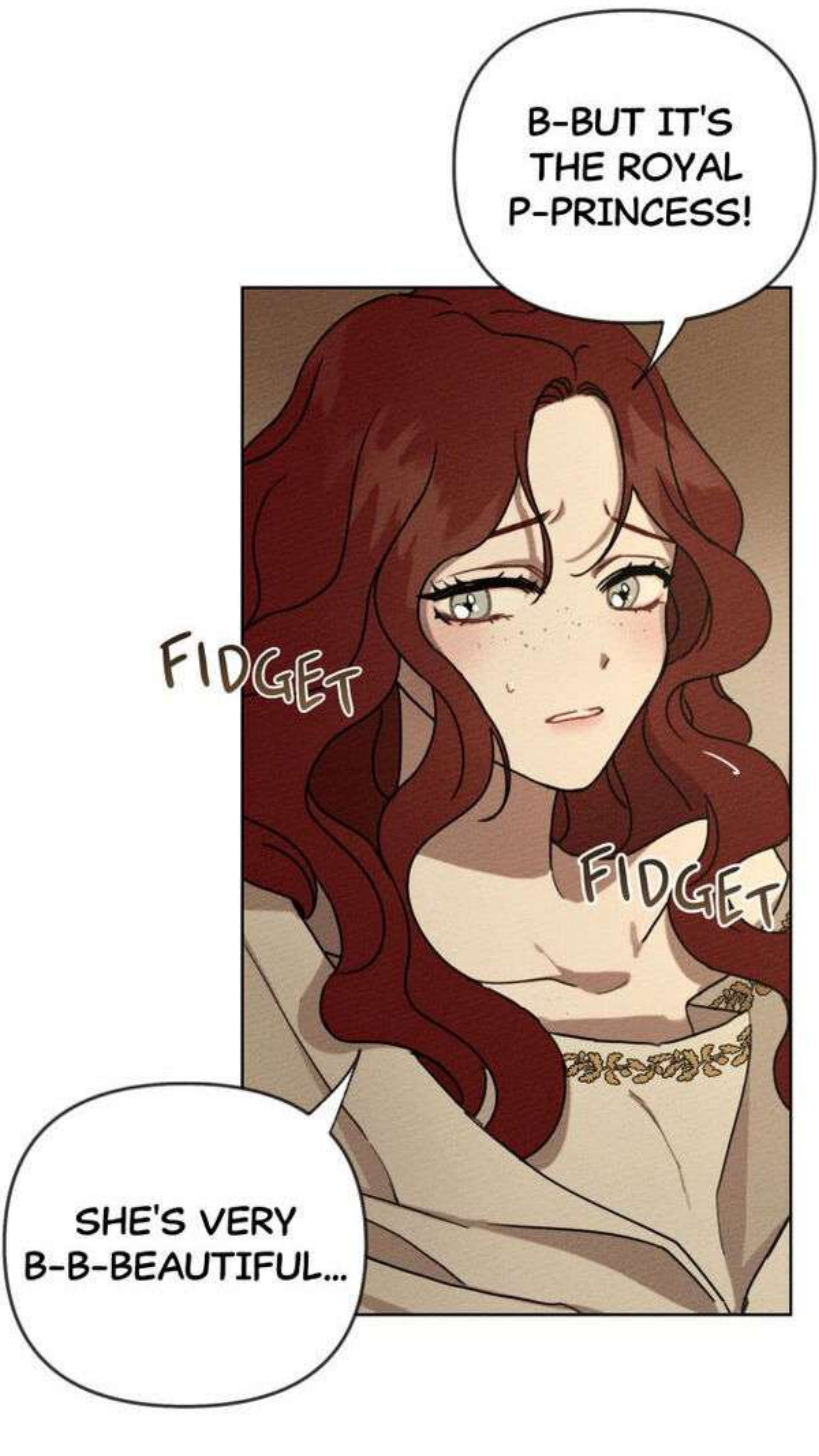

KISS

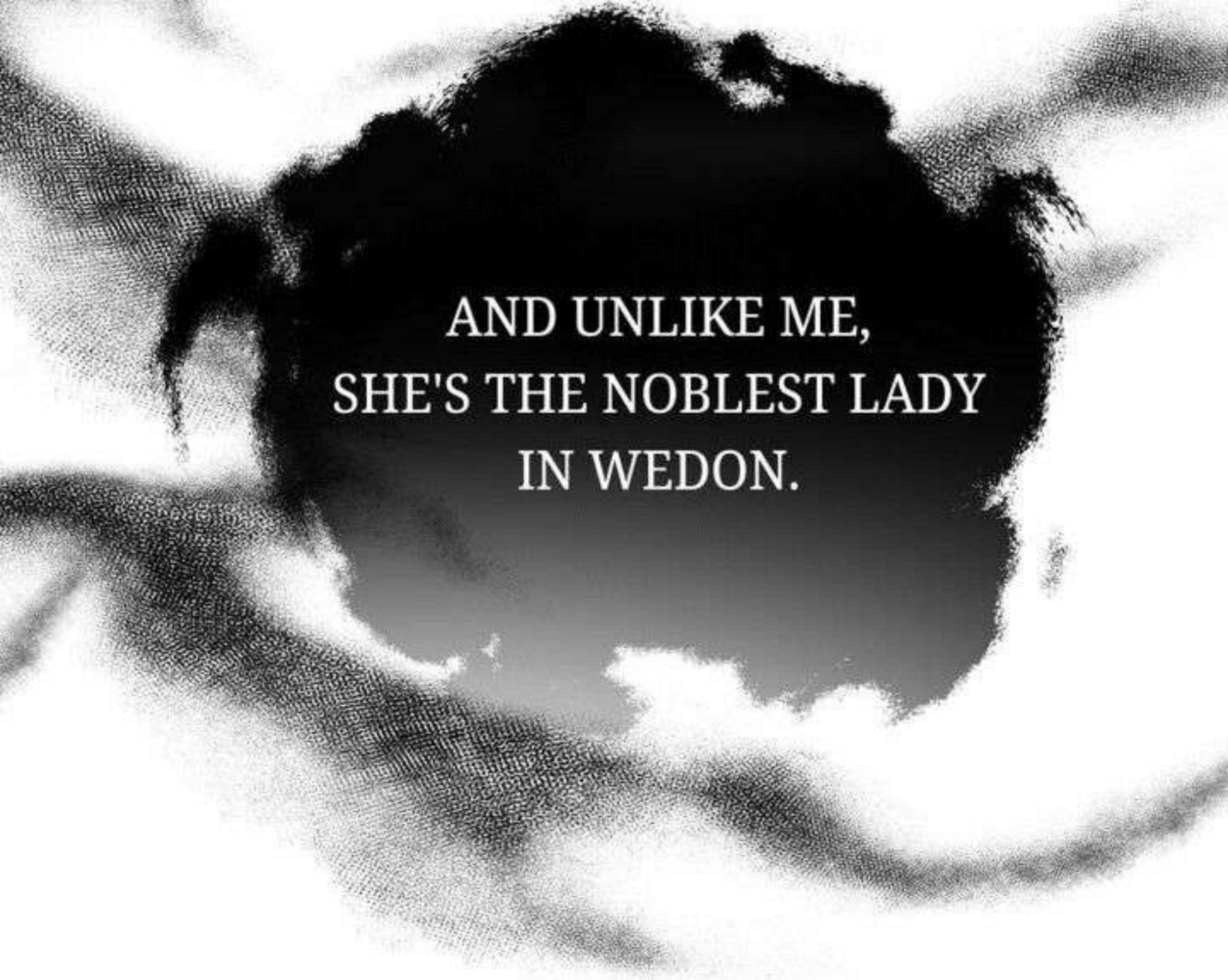

YOU ARE JUST...
MURMUR

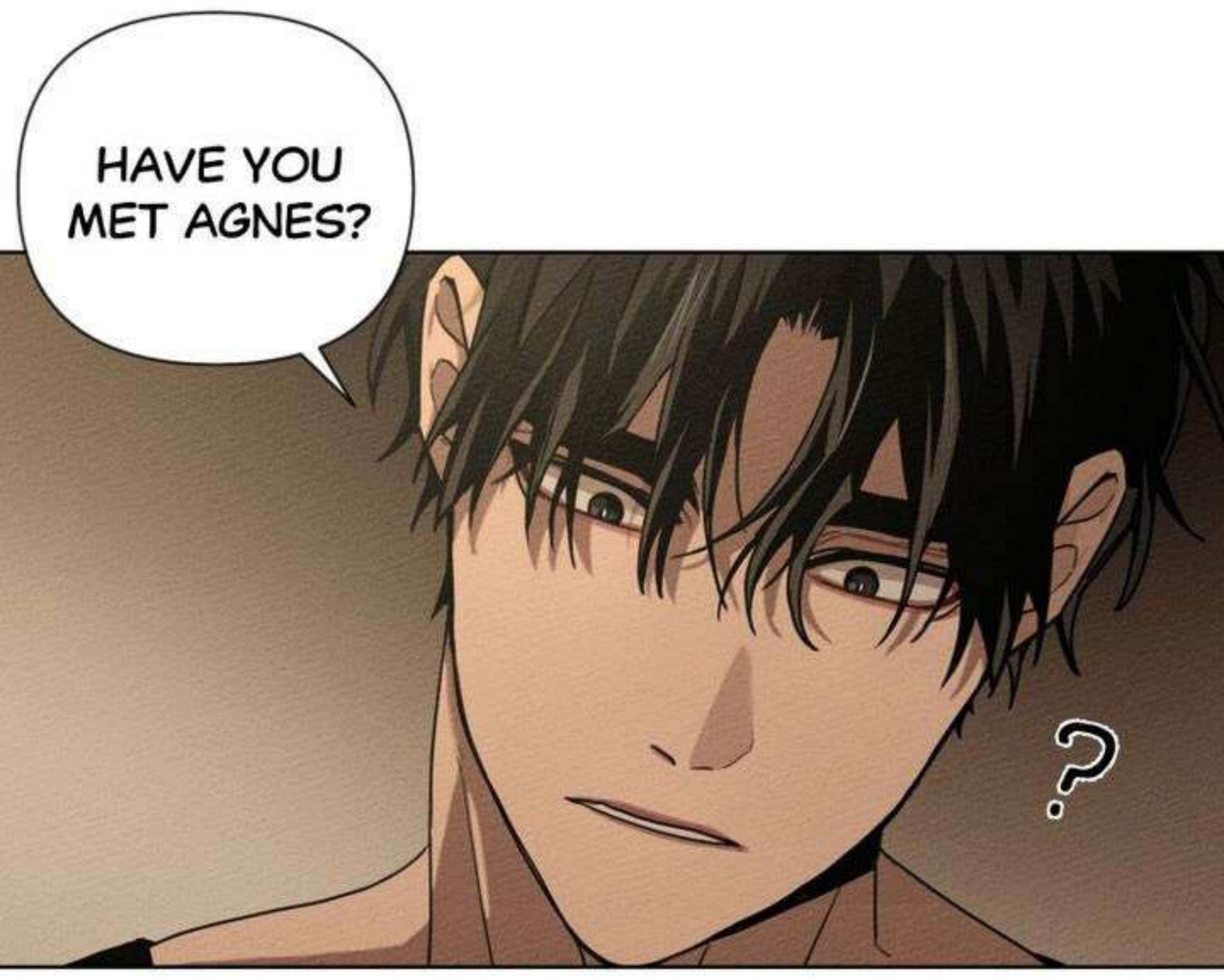

I DON'T KNOW WHAT SILLY RUMORS YOU'VE HEARD, BUT I TURNED DOWN THAT PROPOSAL A LONG TIME AGO.

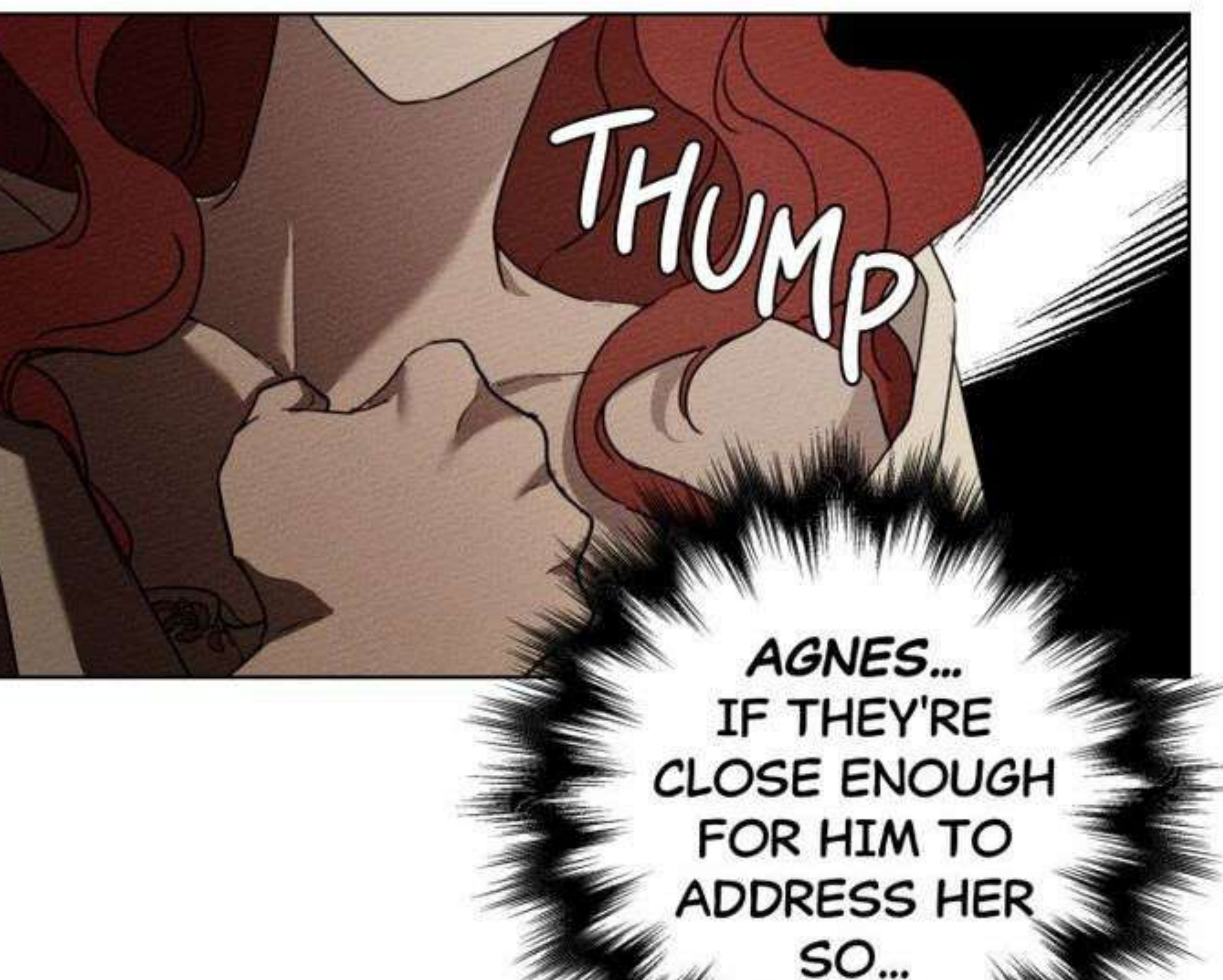

I THOUGHT THE KING HAD FINALLY LOST HIS MIND WHEN HE MADE SUCH AN OFFER TO A MARRIED MAN.

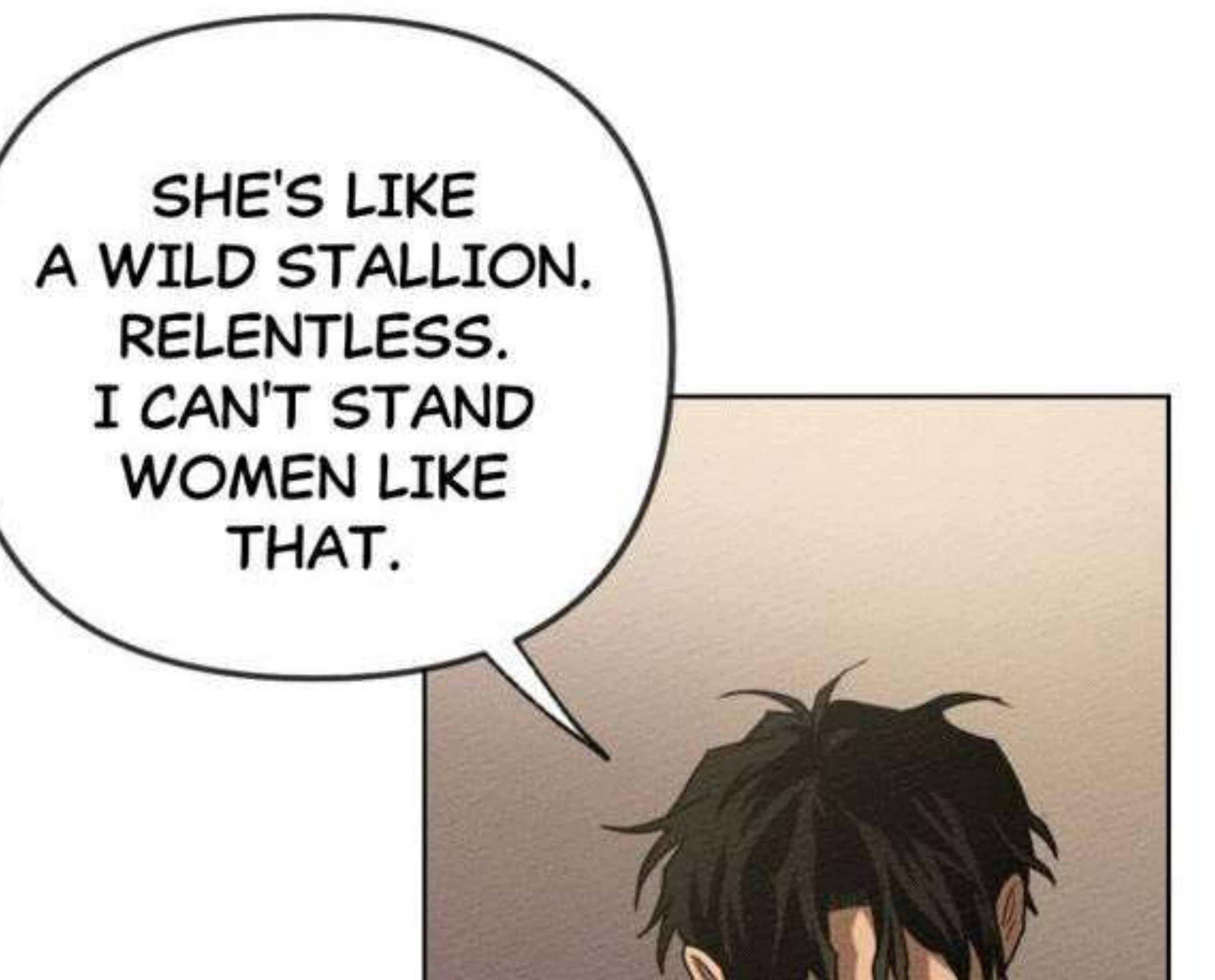

IT'S A SACRED VOW WE SWORE BEFORE GOD.
IF I EVER FIND A BASTARD WHO DARES TO BREAK SUCH HOLY VOWS, I'LL CASTRATE HIM WITH MY OWN HANDS.
GRIM
OH..

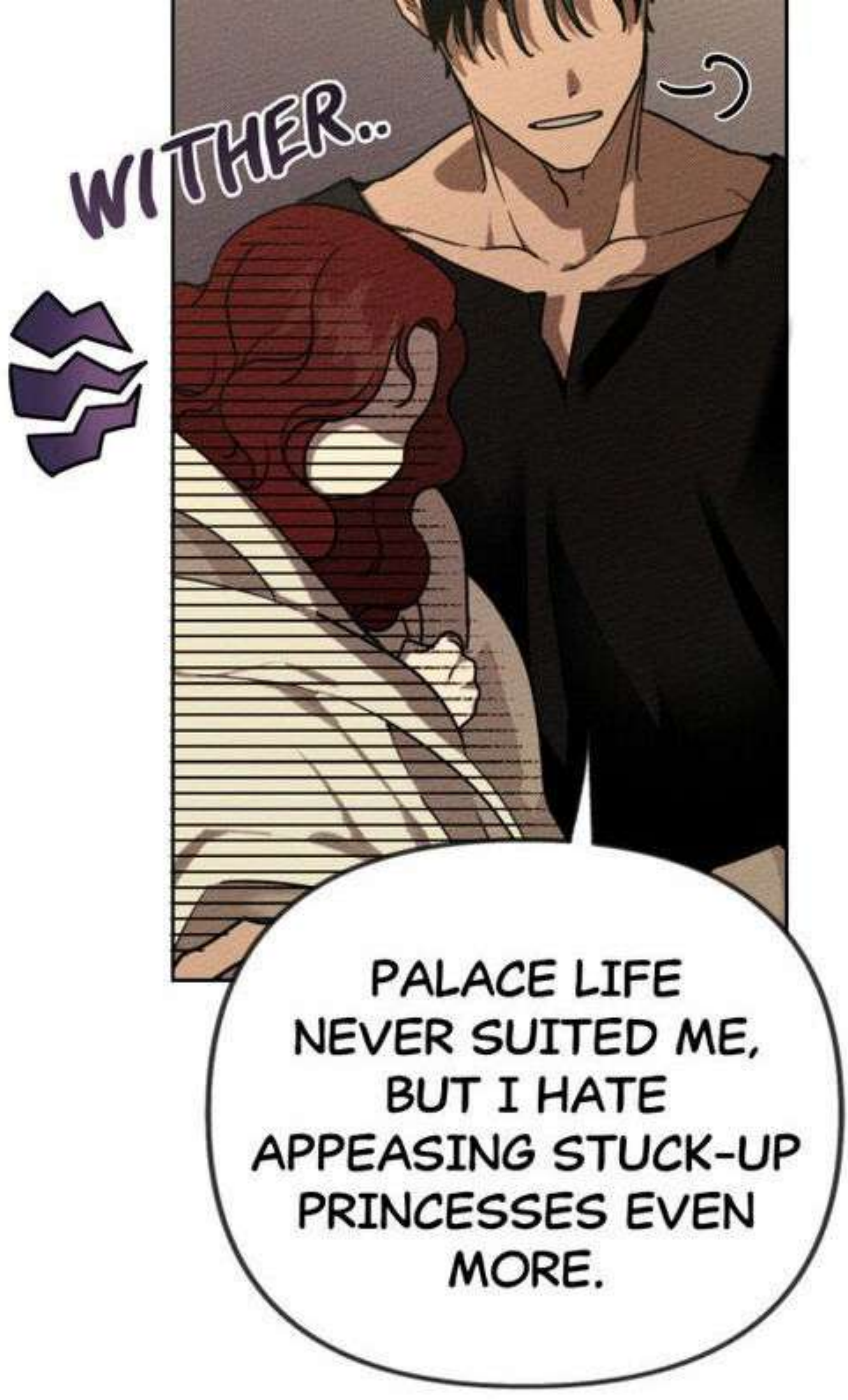

B-BUT IT'S THE ROYAL P-PRINCESS!
FIDGET
FIDGET
SHE'S VERY B-B-BEAUTIFUL...

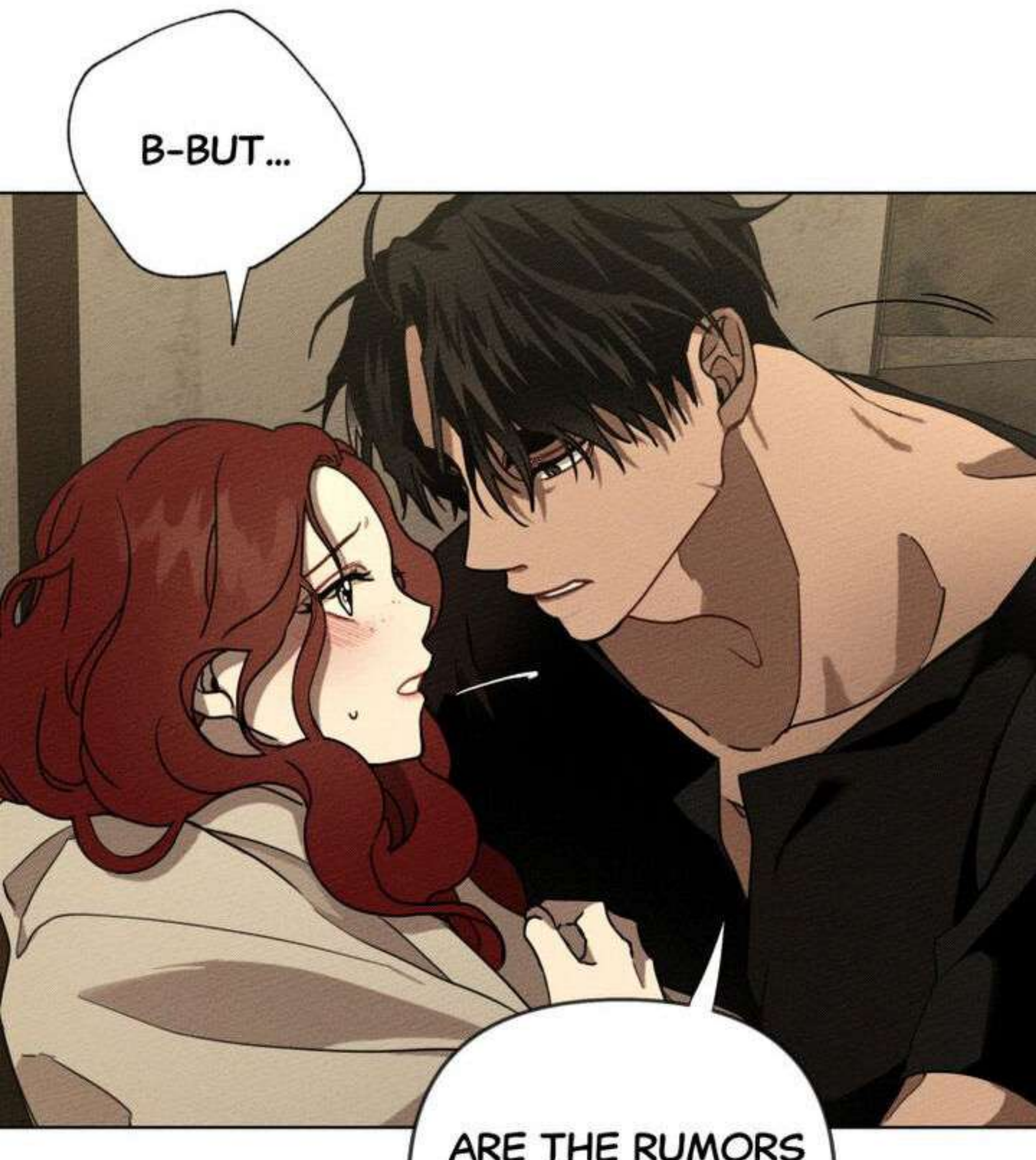

AND UNLIKE ME, SHE'S THE NOBLEST LADY IN WEDON.

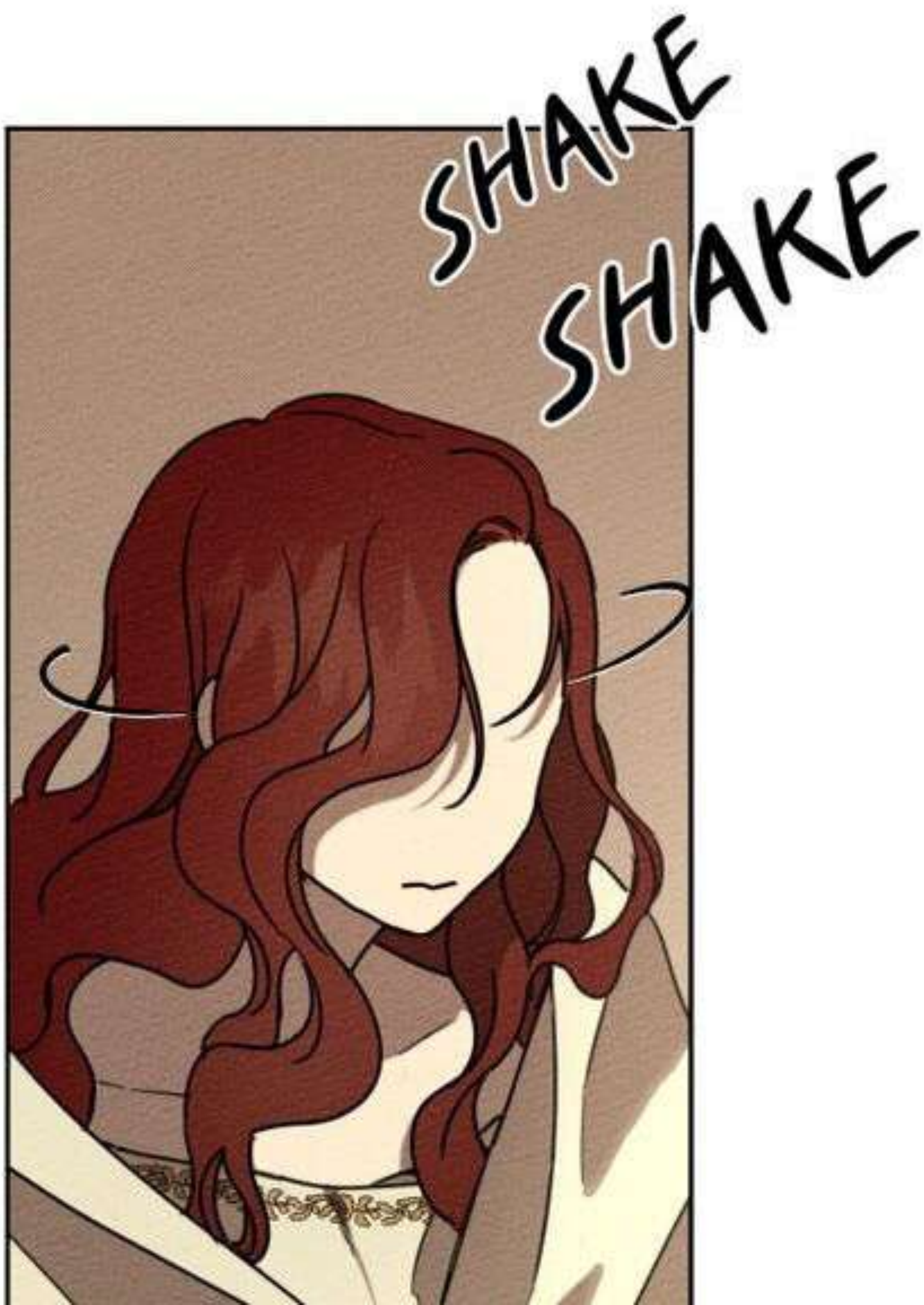

HAVE YOU MET AGNES?
?

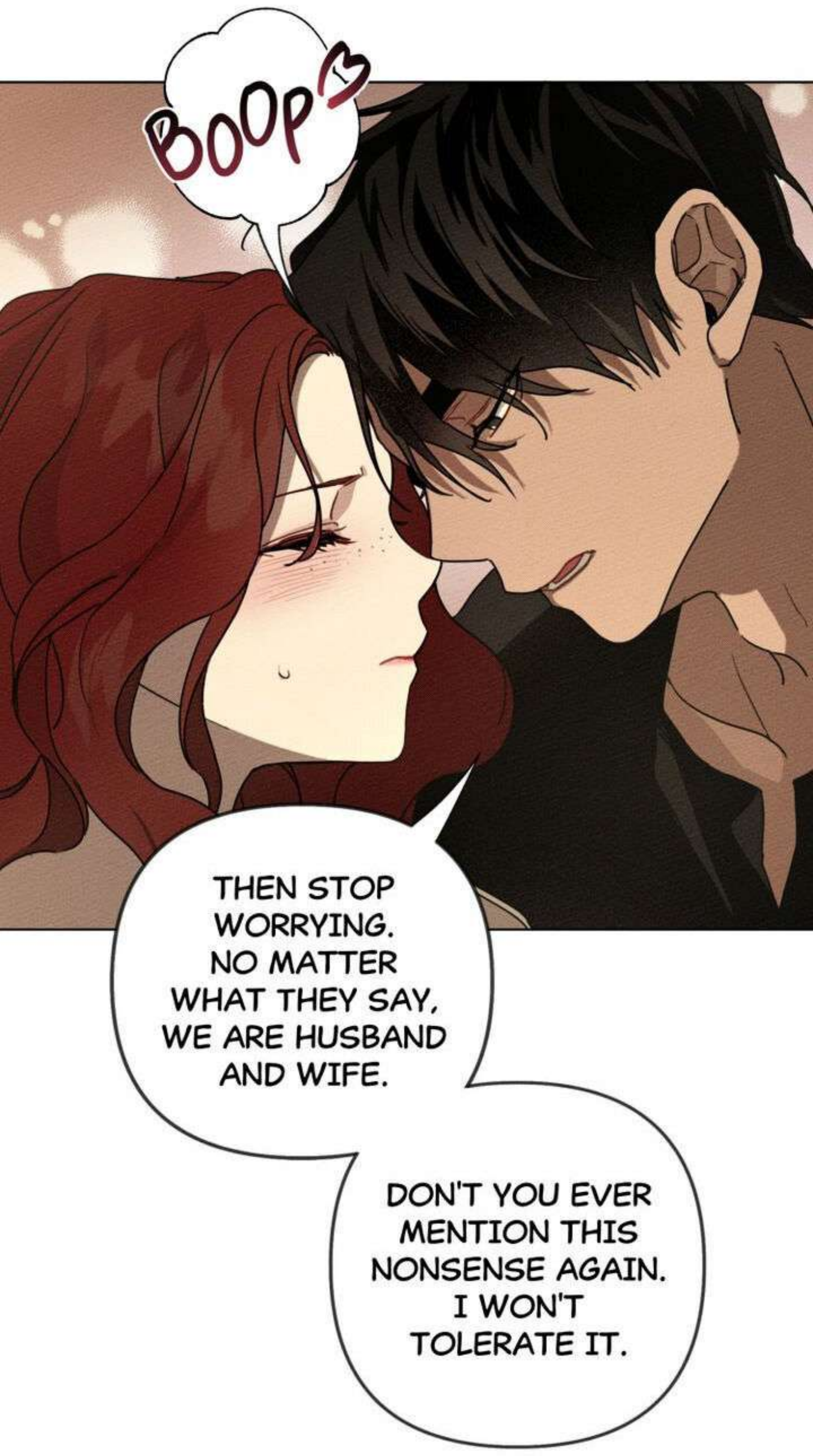

THUMP
AGNES... IF THEY'RE CLOSE ENOUGH FOR HIM TO ADDRESS HER SO...

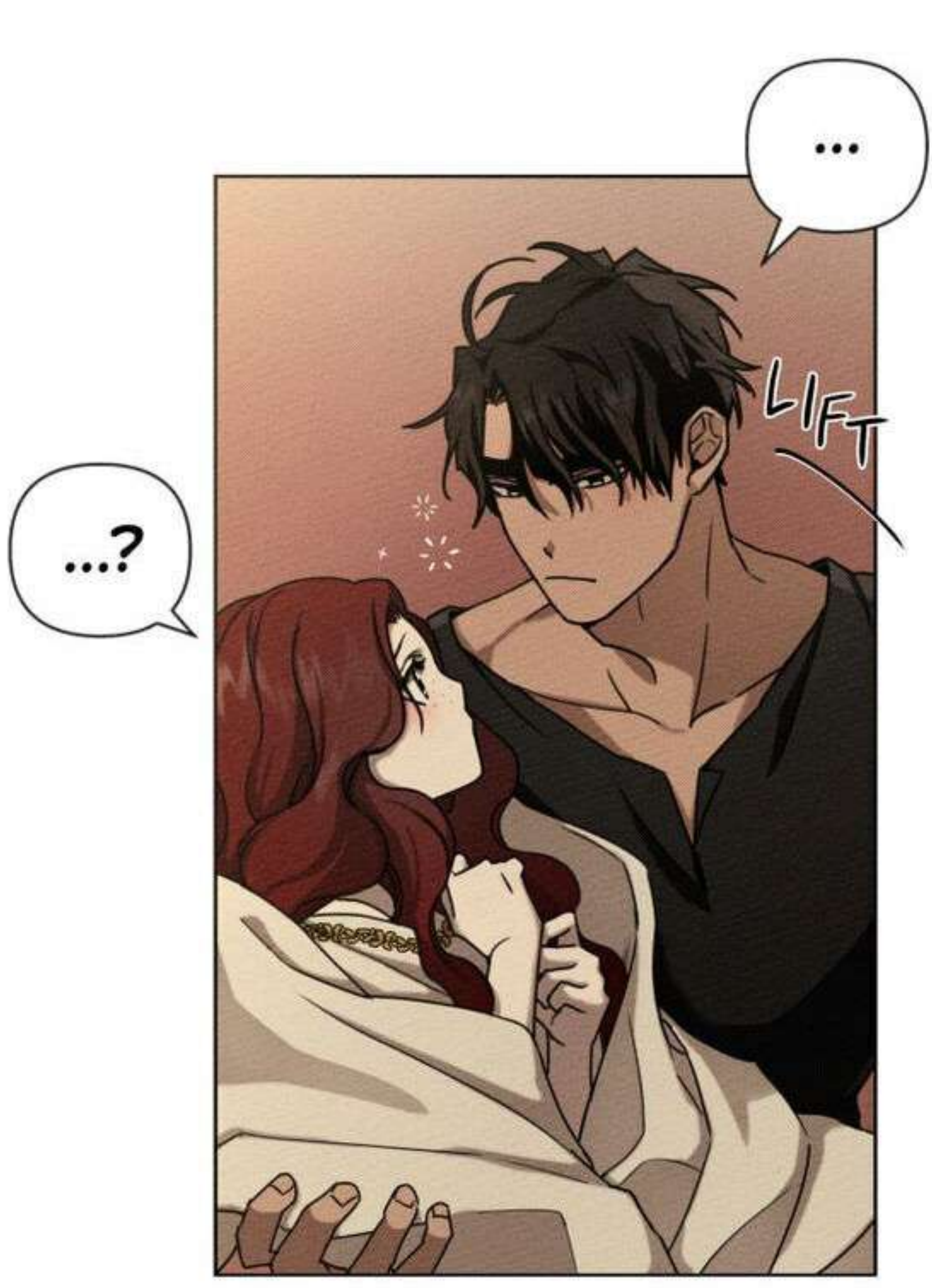

SHE'S LIKE A WILD STALLION. RELENTLESS. I CAN'T STAND WOMEN LIKE THAT.

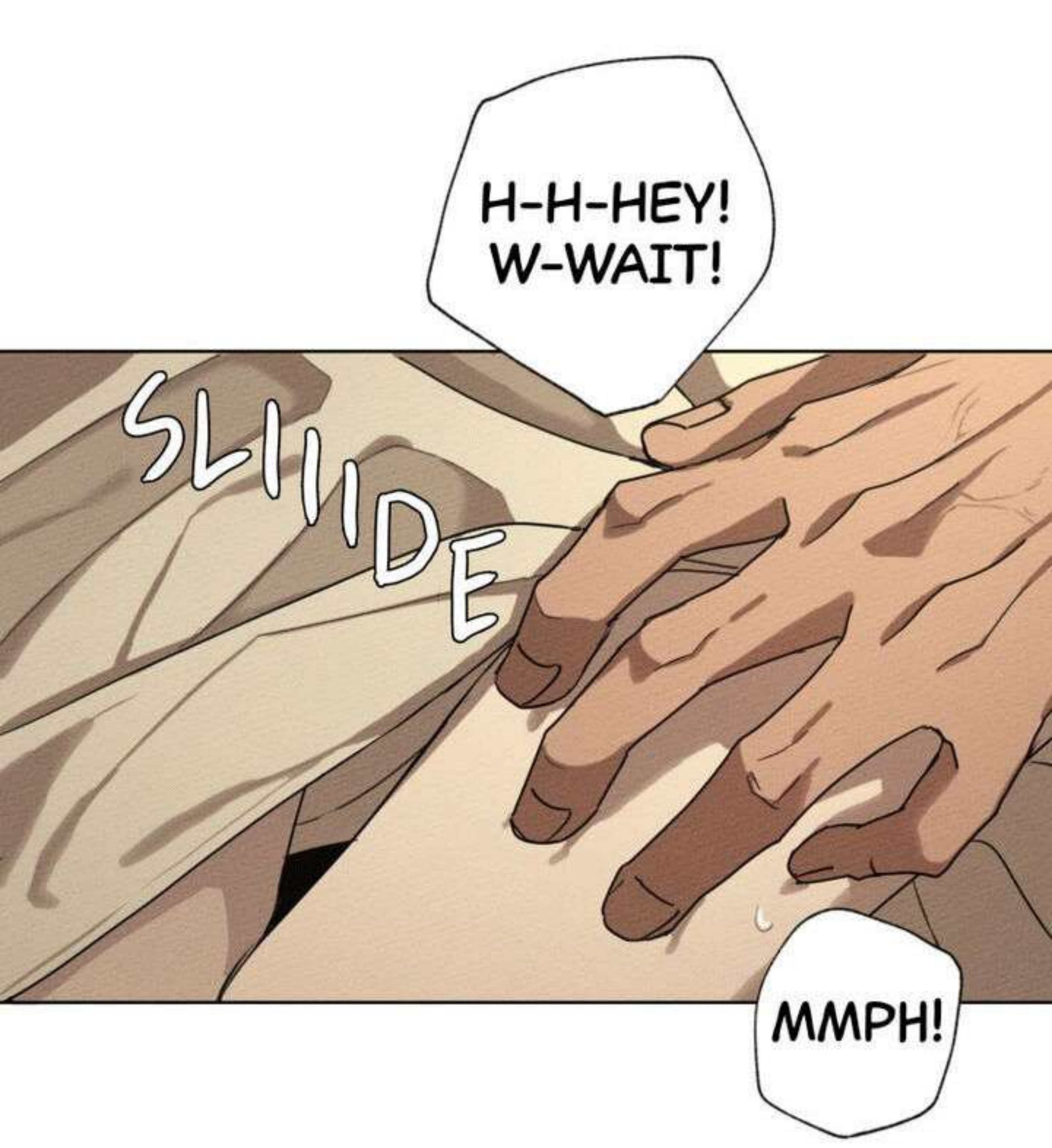

WITHER..
PALACE LIFE NEVER SUITED ME, BUT I HATE APPEASING STUCK-UP PRINCESSES EVEN MORE.

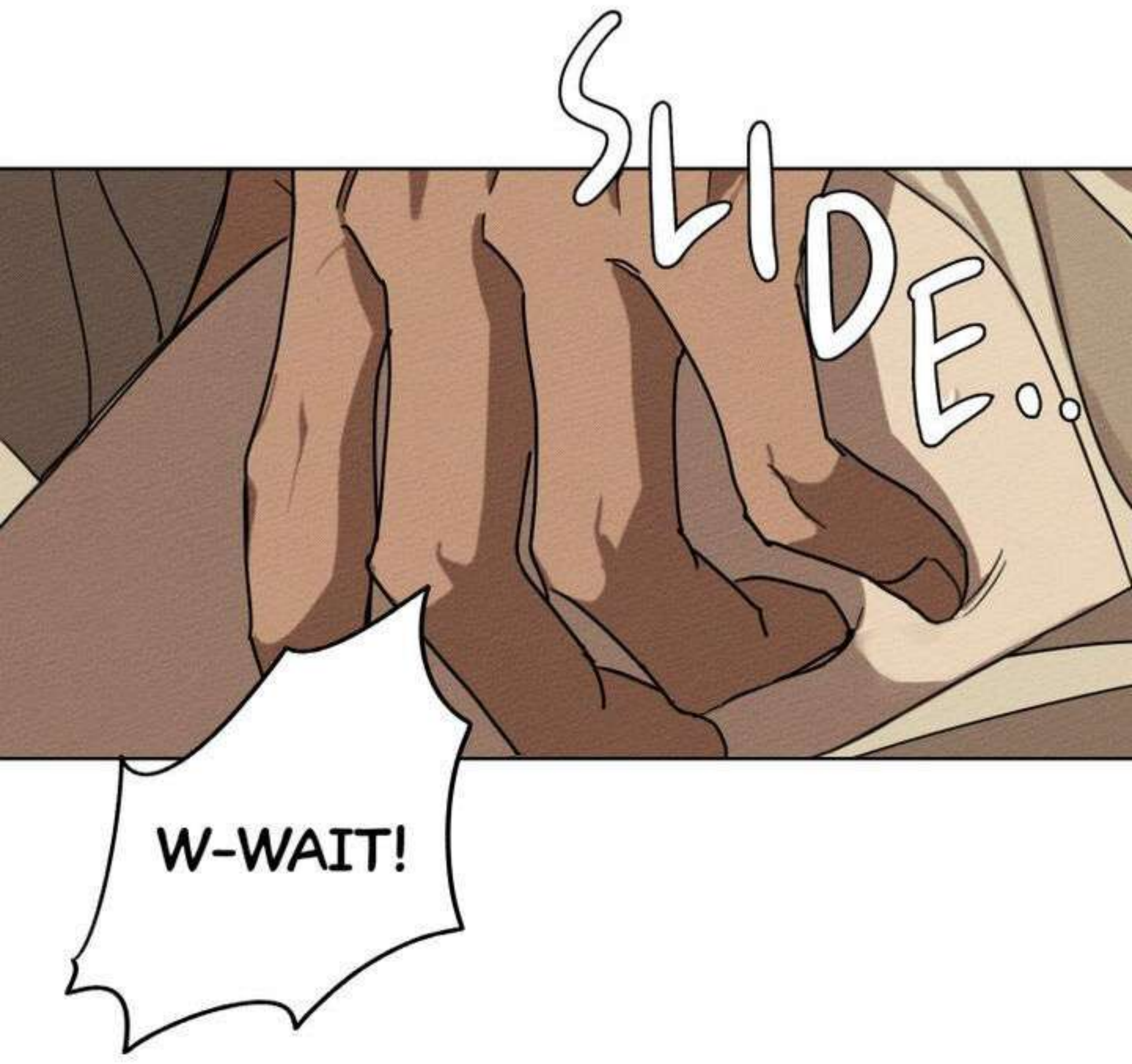

B-BUT...
ARE THE RUMORS JUST AN EXCUSE FOR A DIVORCE?

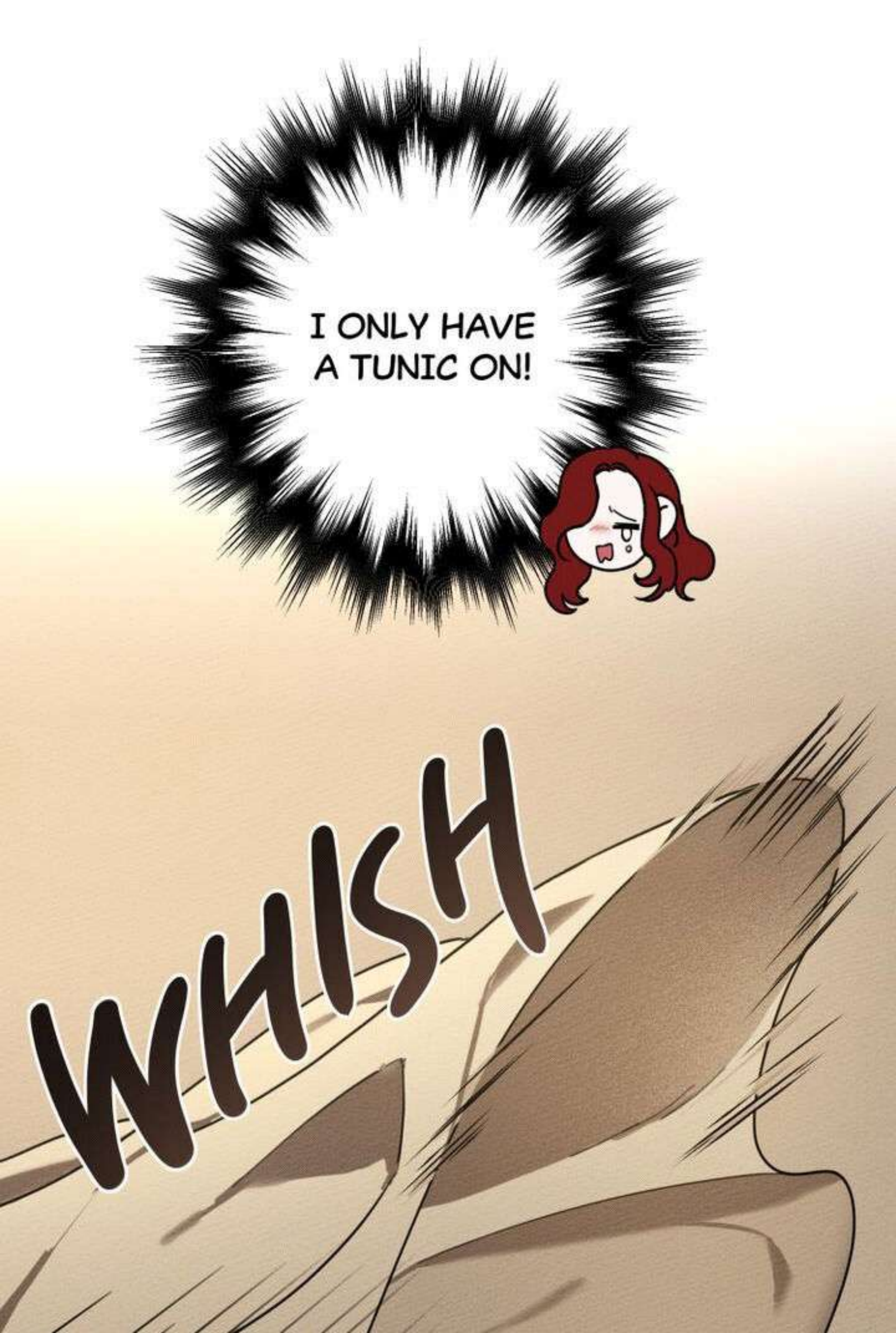

SHAKE
SHAKE

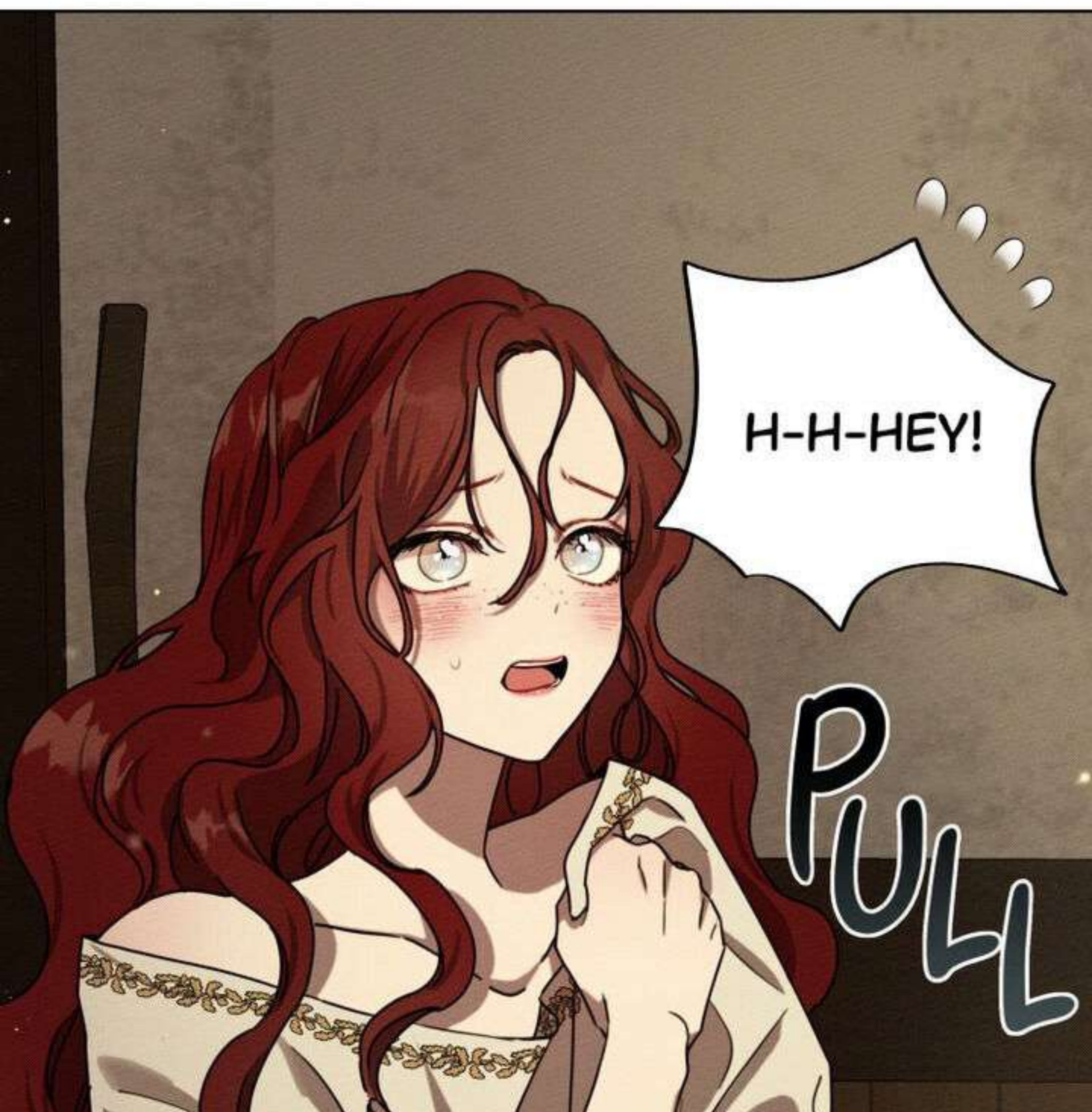

BOOP
THEN STOP WORRYING. NO MATTER WHAT THEY SAY, WE ARE HUSBAND AND WIFE.
DON'T YOU EVER MENTION THIS NONSENSE AGAIN. I WON'T TOLERATE IT.

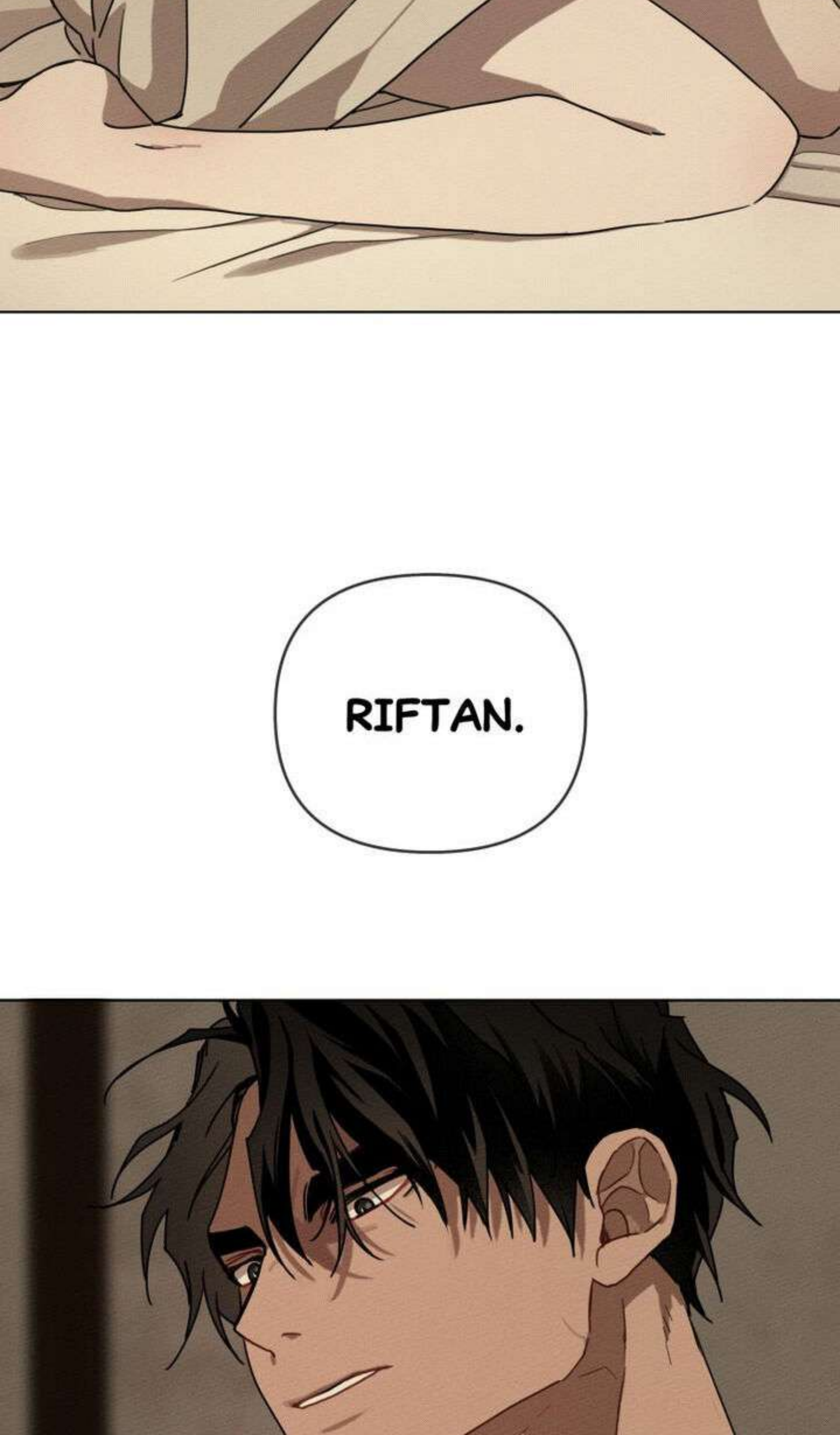

...
LIFT
...?

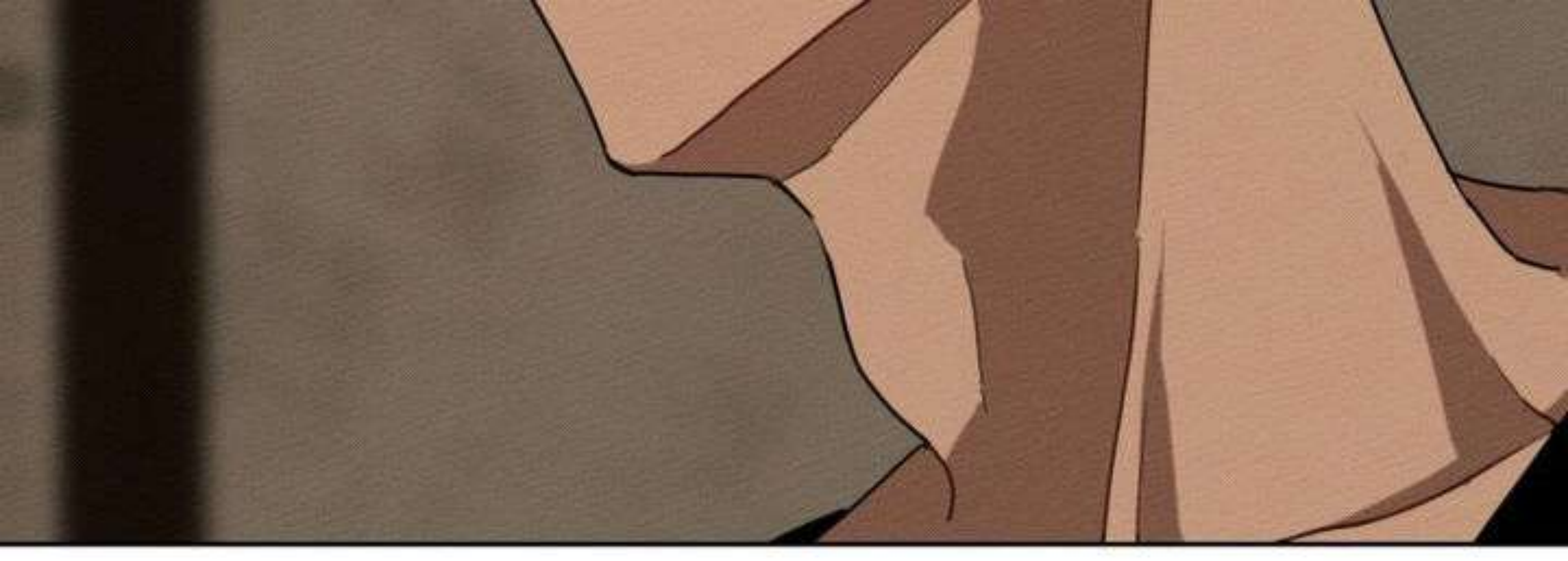

H-H-HEY!
W-WAIT!
SLIIIDE
MMPH!

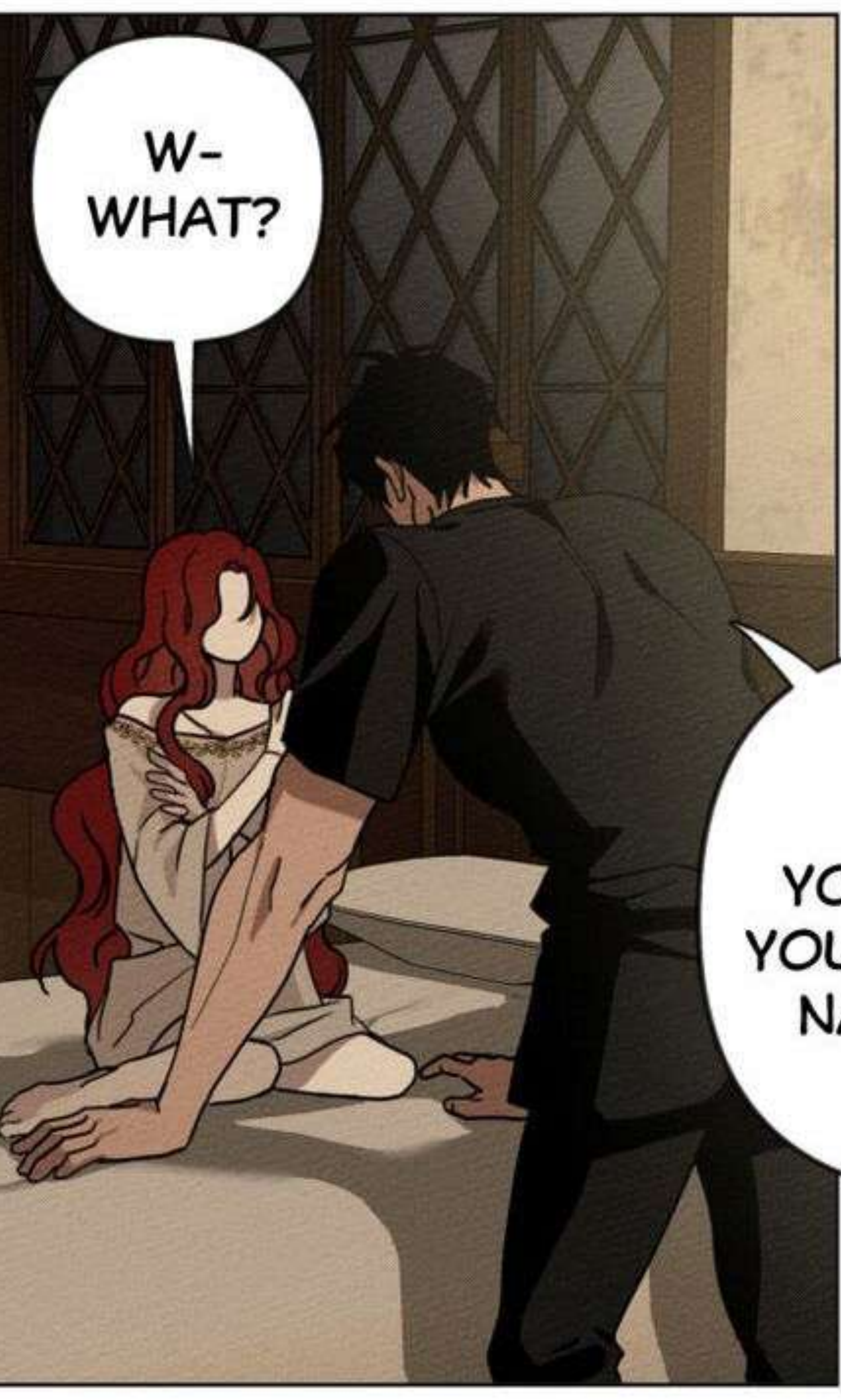

SLIDE..
W-WAIT!

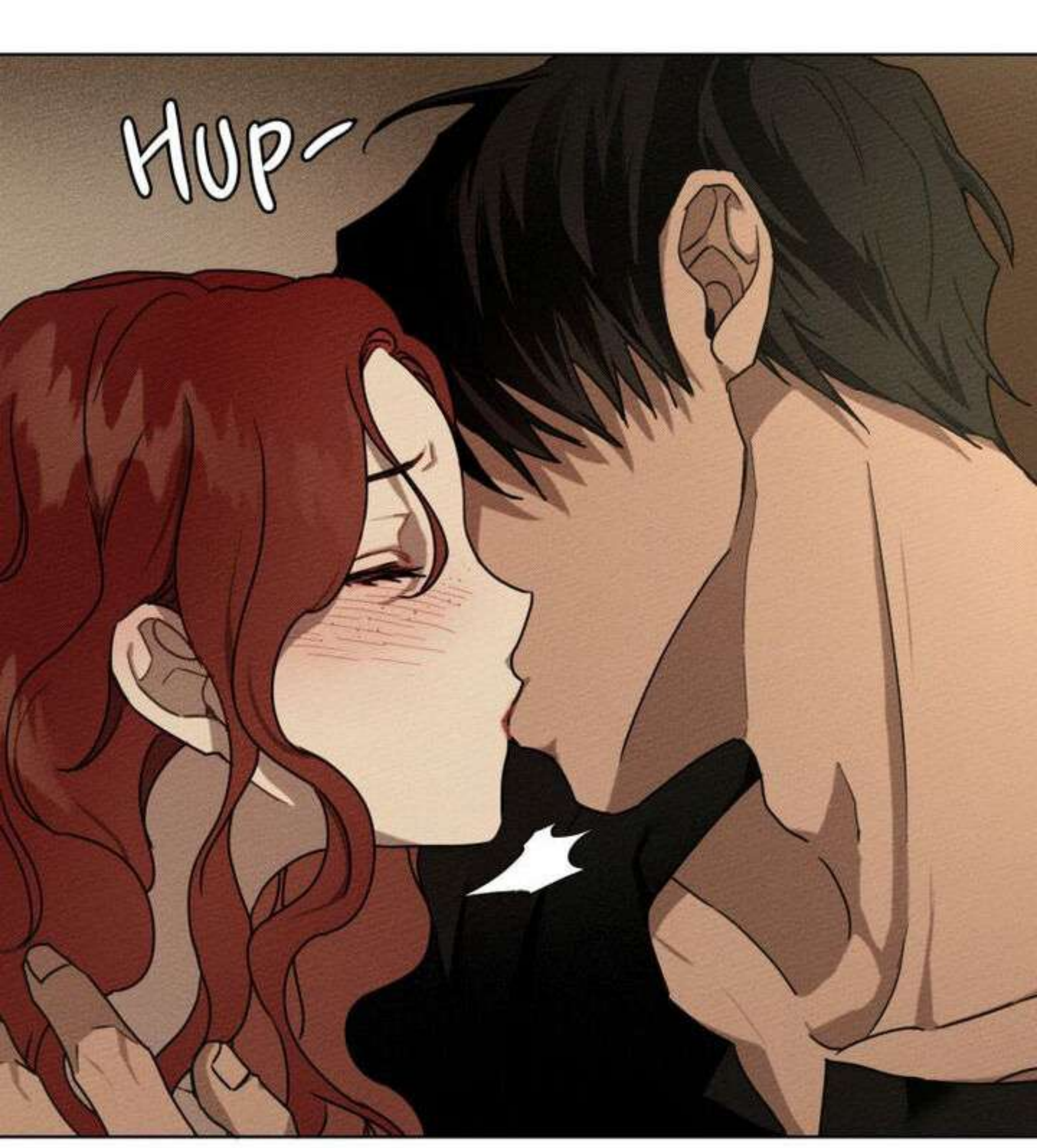

I ONLY HAVE
A TUNIC ON!
WHISH

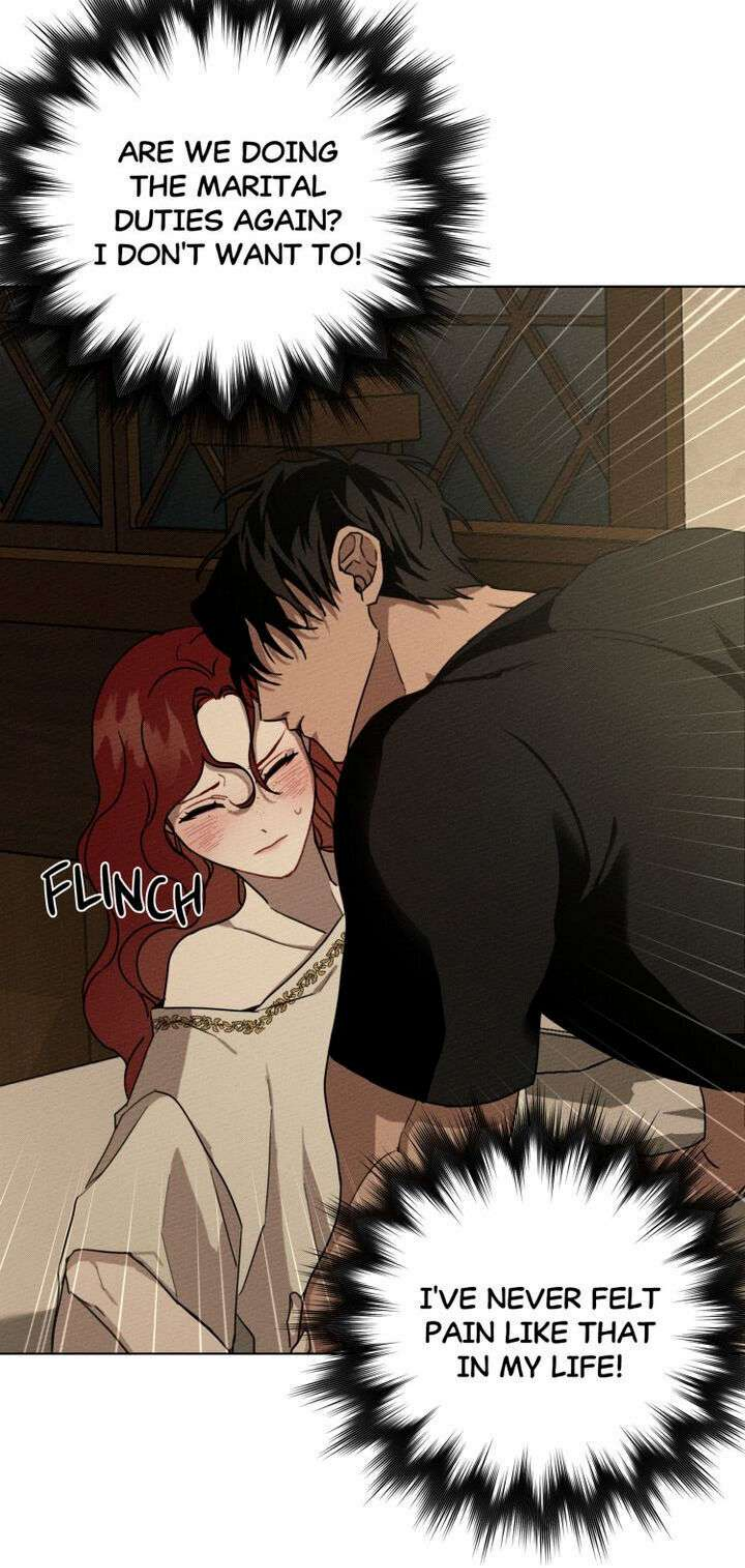

H-H-HEY!
PULL


RIFTAN.



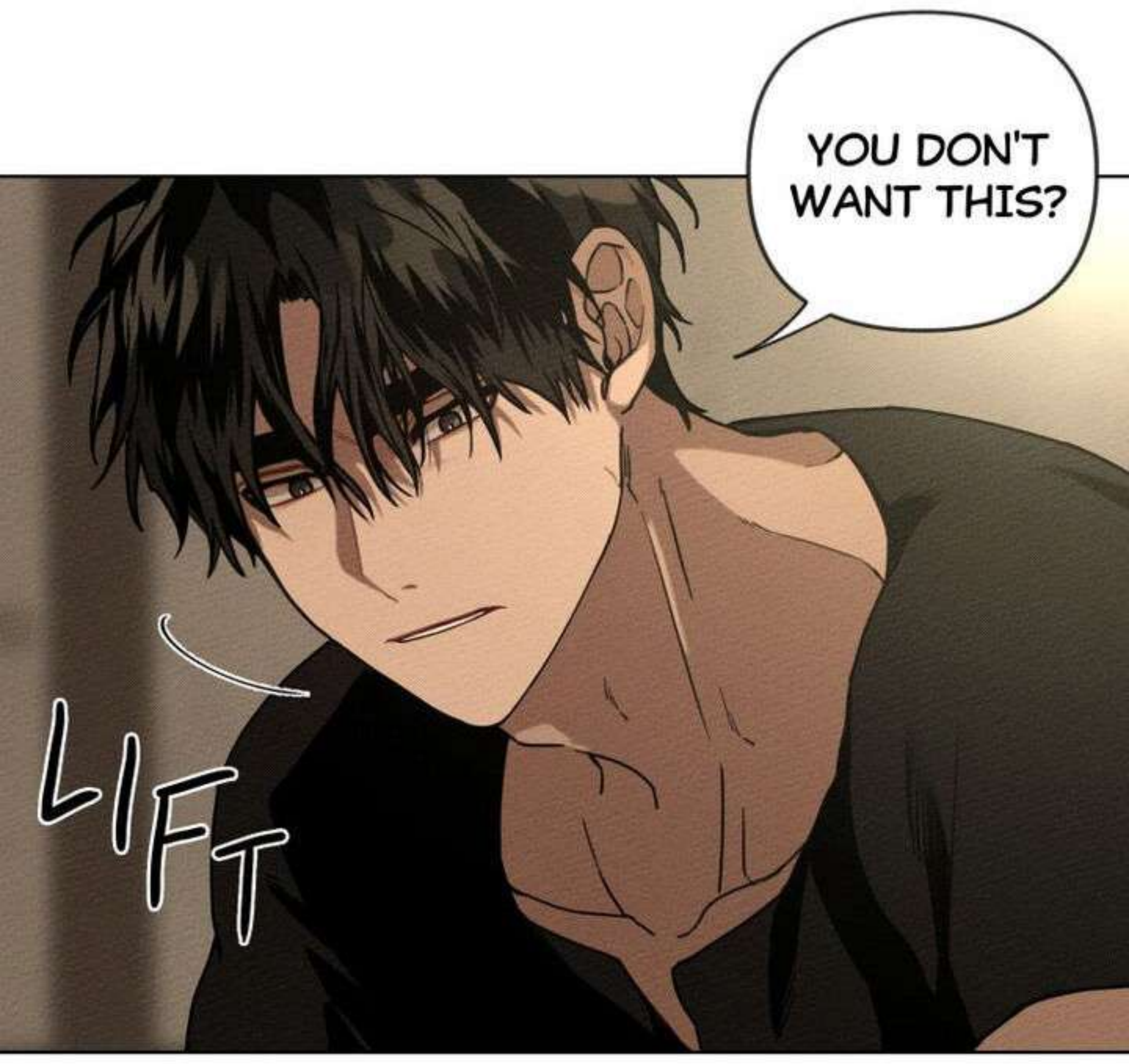

W-
WHAT?
RIFTAN.
NOT HEY.
YOU DO KNOW
YOUR HUSBAND'S
NAME, DON'T
YOU?

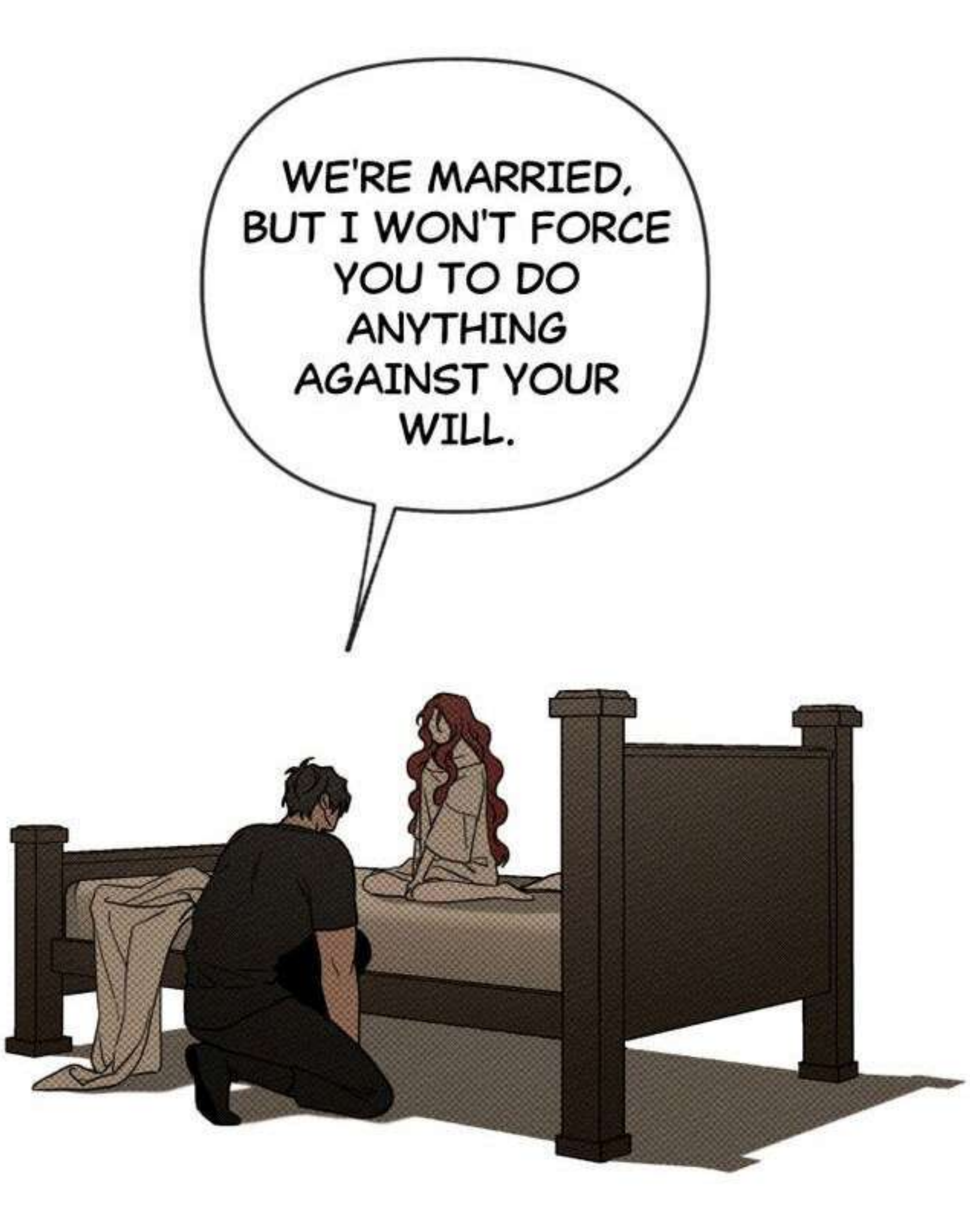

HUP-


ARE WE DOING THE MARITAL DUTIES AGAIN? I DON'T WANT TO!
FLINCH
I'VE NEVER FELT PAIN LIKE THAT IN MY LIFE!

PAUSE
...?

HUH? WHY DID HE SUDDENLY... STOP?

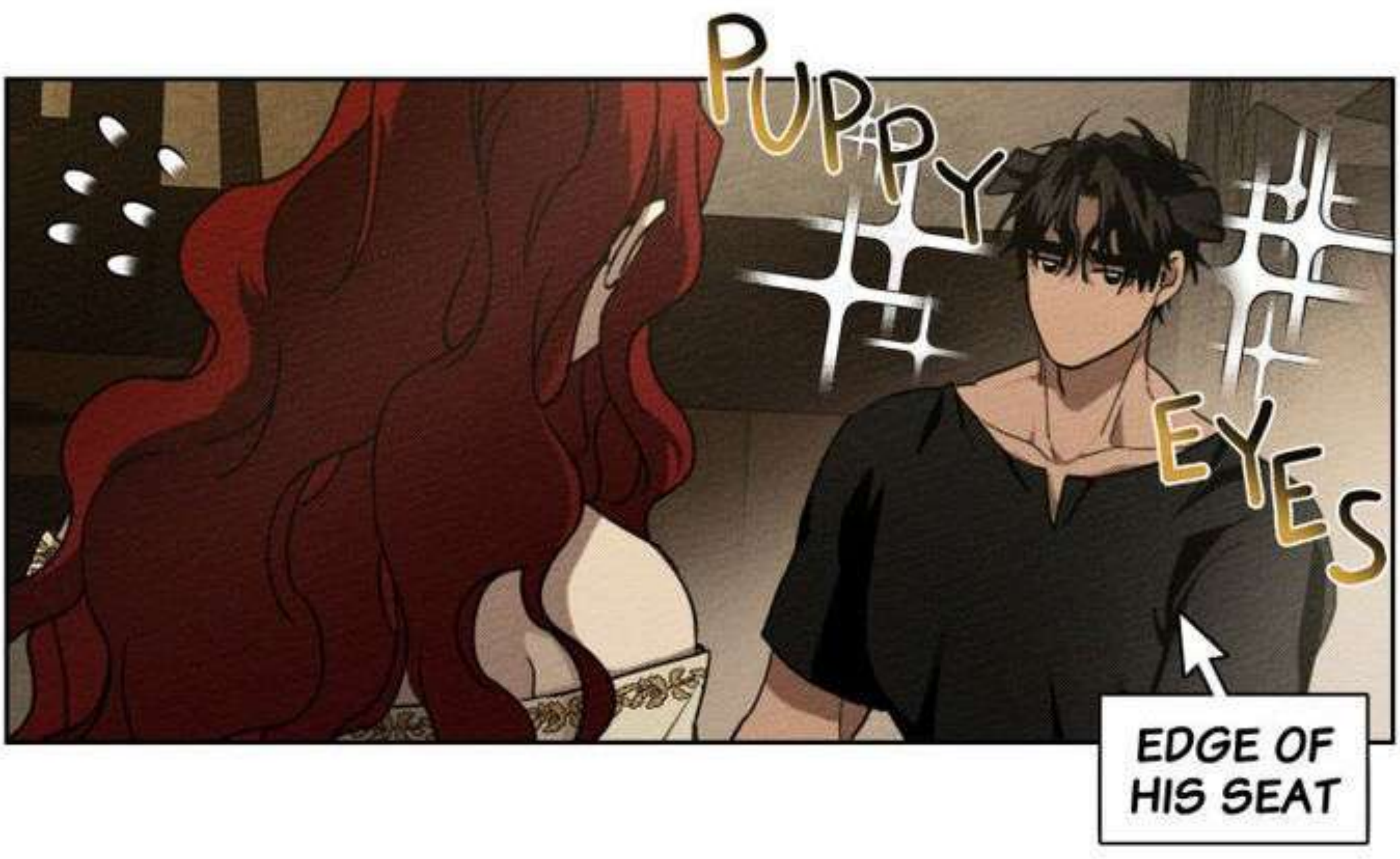

YOU DON'T WANT THIS?
LIFT


WE'RE MARRIED, BUT I WON'T FORCE YOU TO DO ANYTHING AGAINST YOUR WILL.

WHAT SHOULD I

DO?

WOULD HE LEAVE ME IF I TURNED HIM DOWN RIGHT NOW?


PUPPY EYES
EDGE OF HIS SEAT

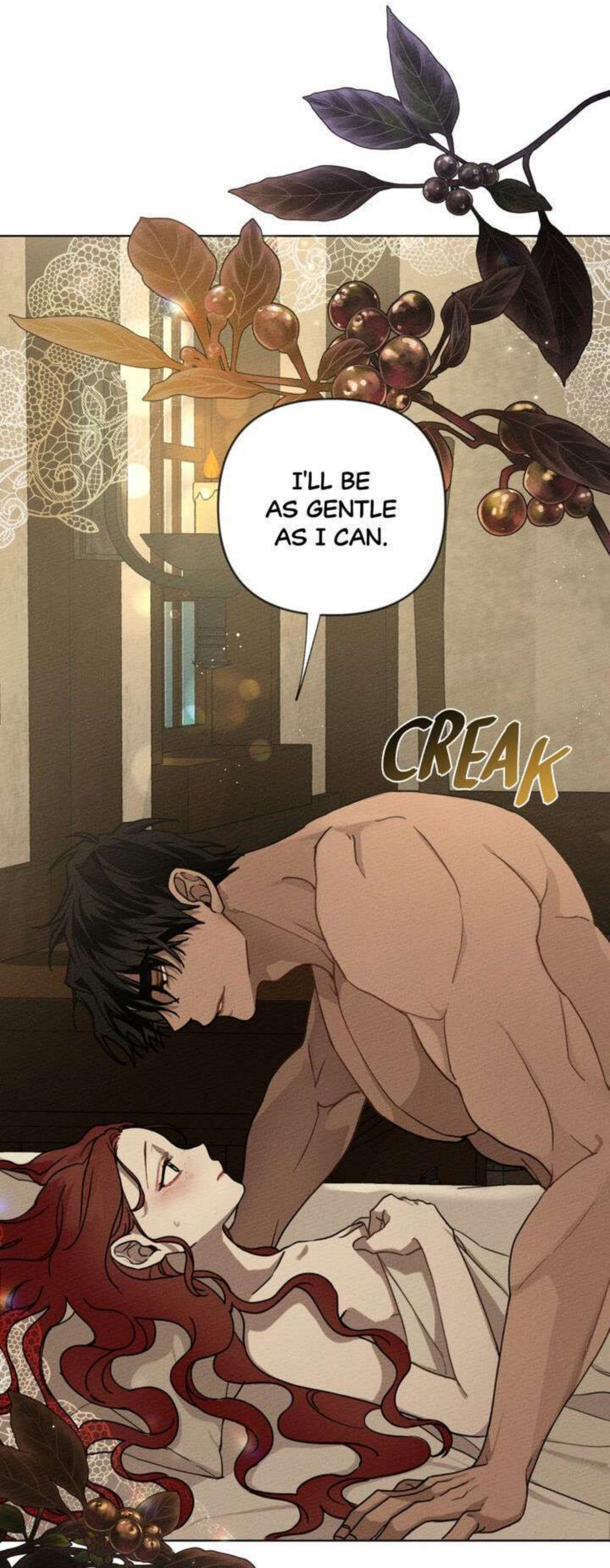
HE THREW AWAY THE CHANCE TO MARRY THE PRINCESS FOR ME...

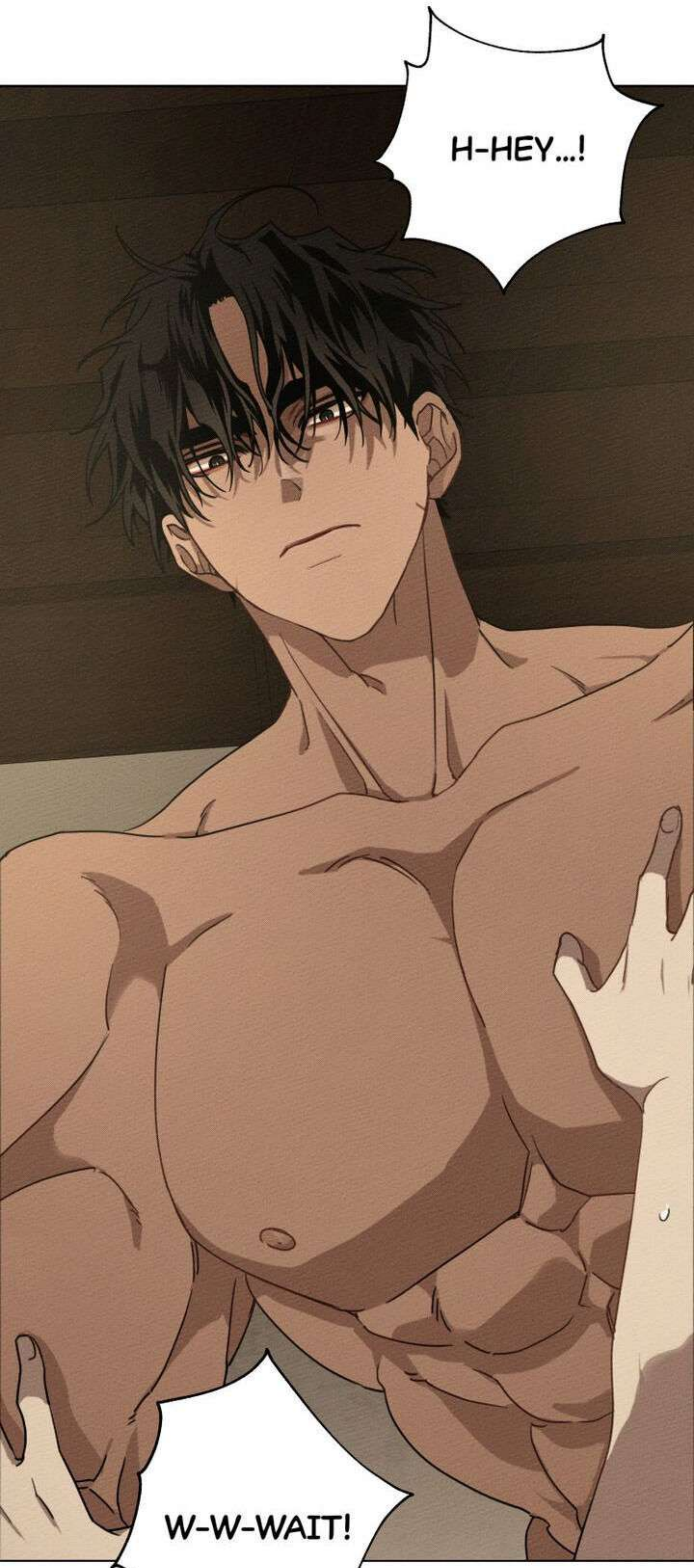
I HAVE TO HONOR MY DUTY AS A WIFE, TOO.

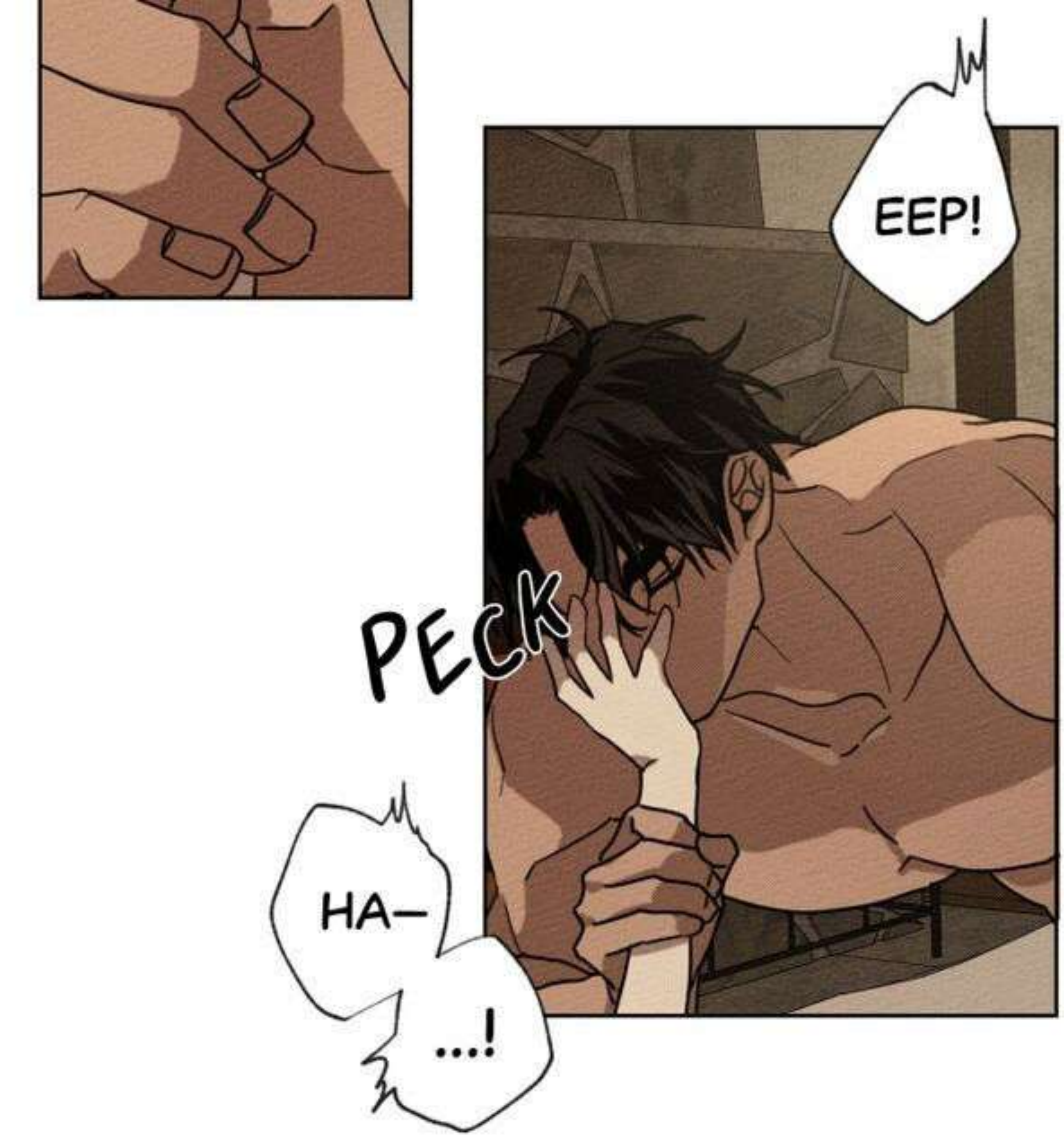
....N-N-

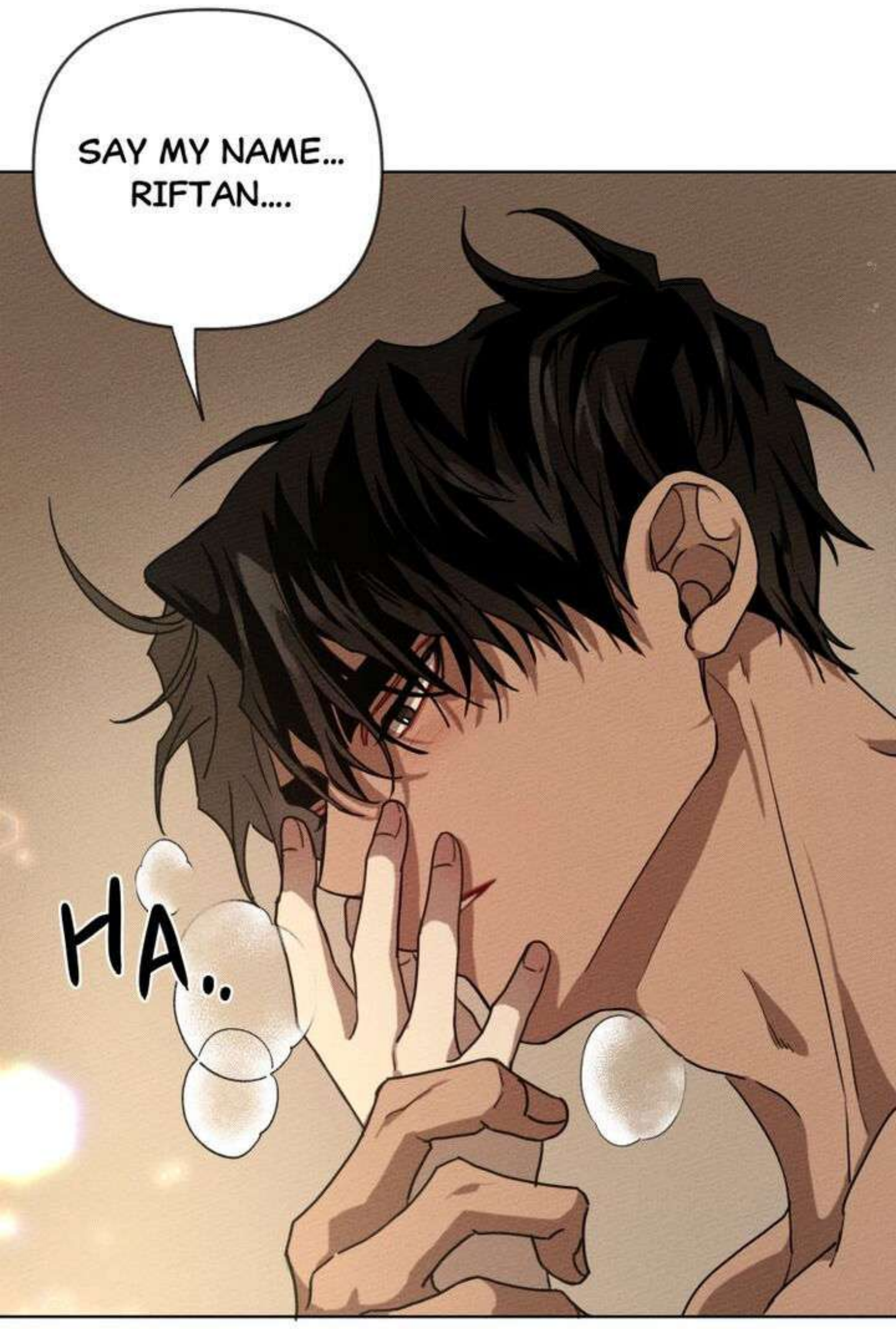
NO...

SLIP

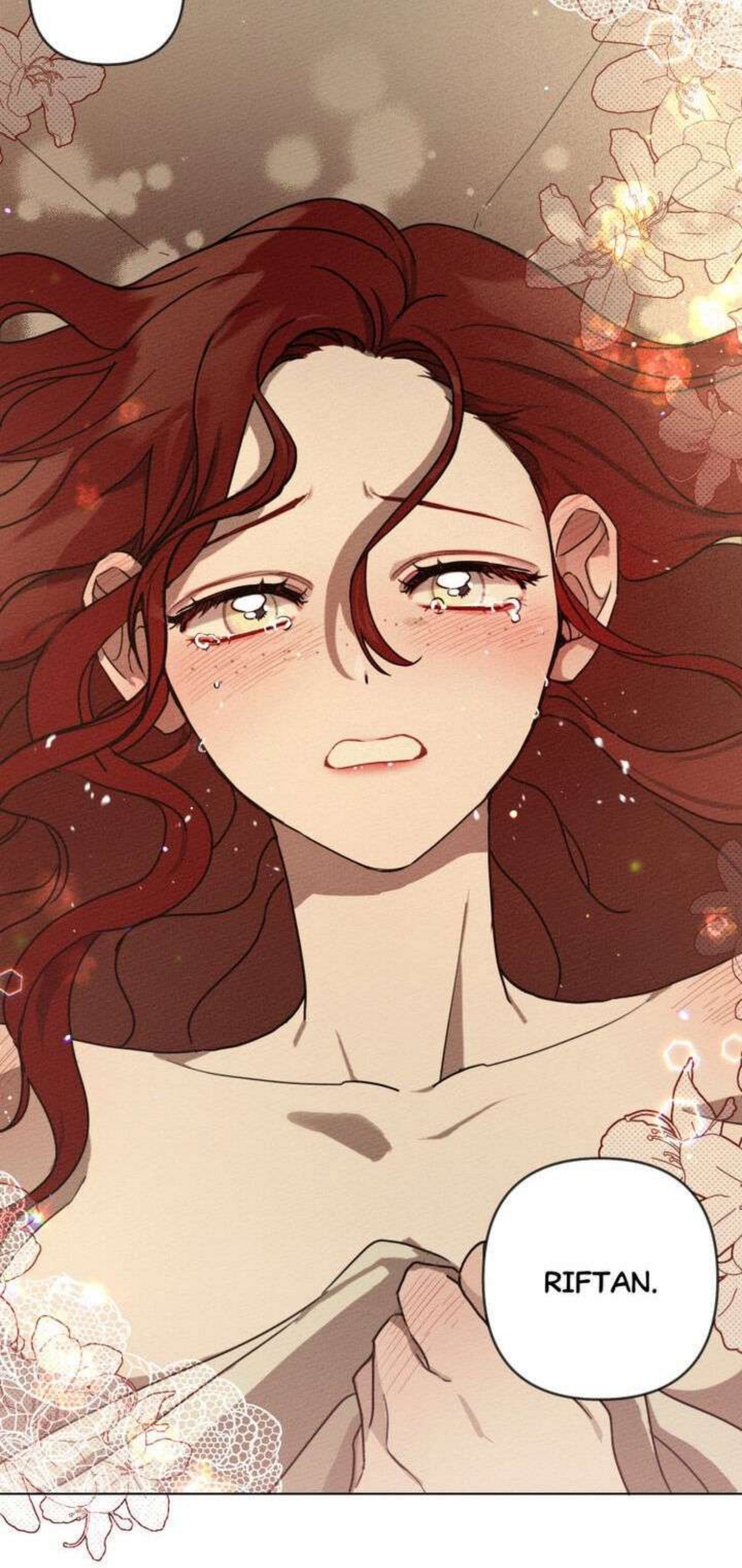

I'LL BE AS GENTLE AS I CAN.
CREAK

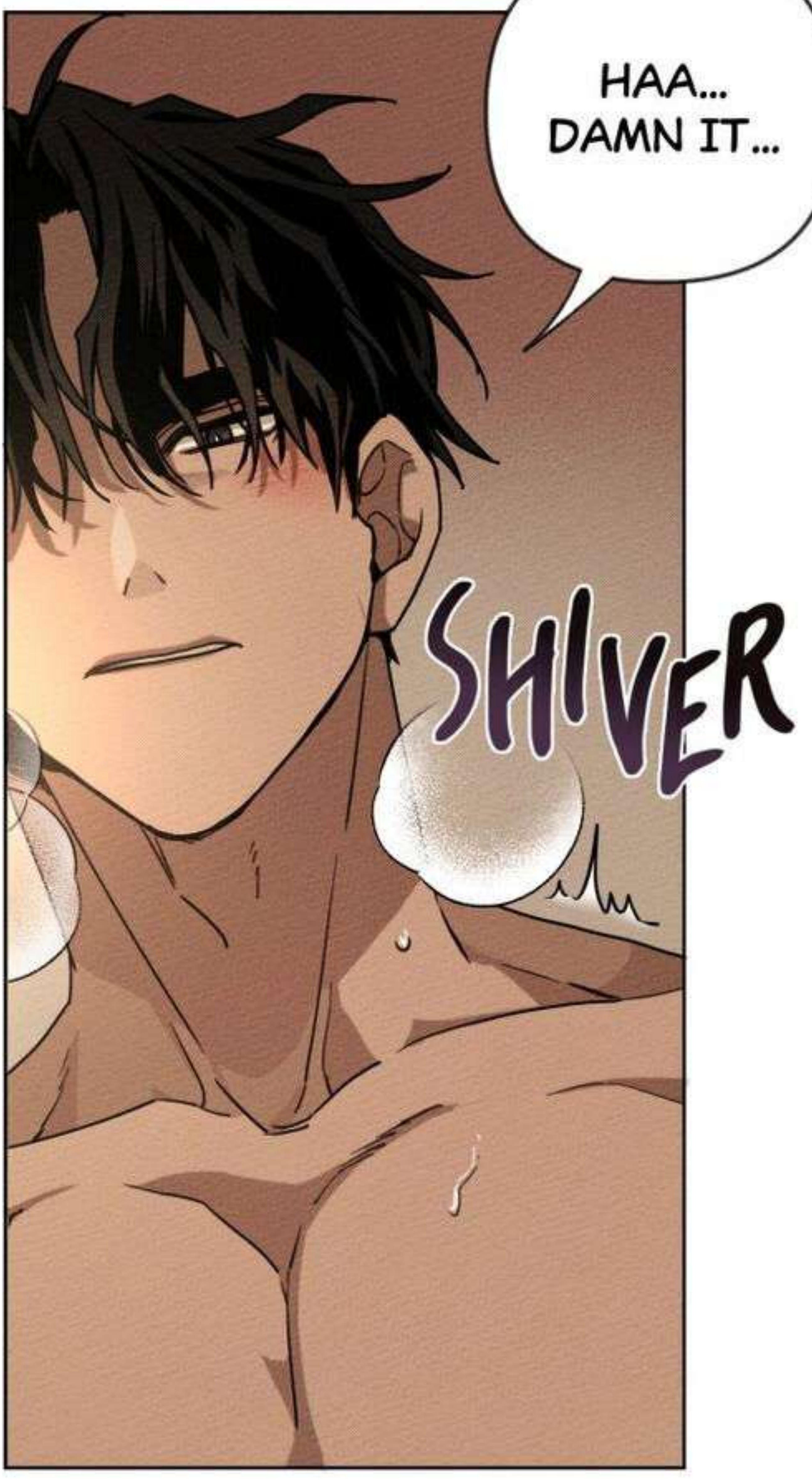

H-HEY...!
W-W-WAIT!

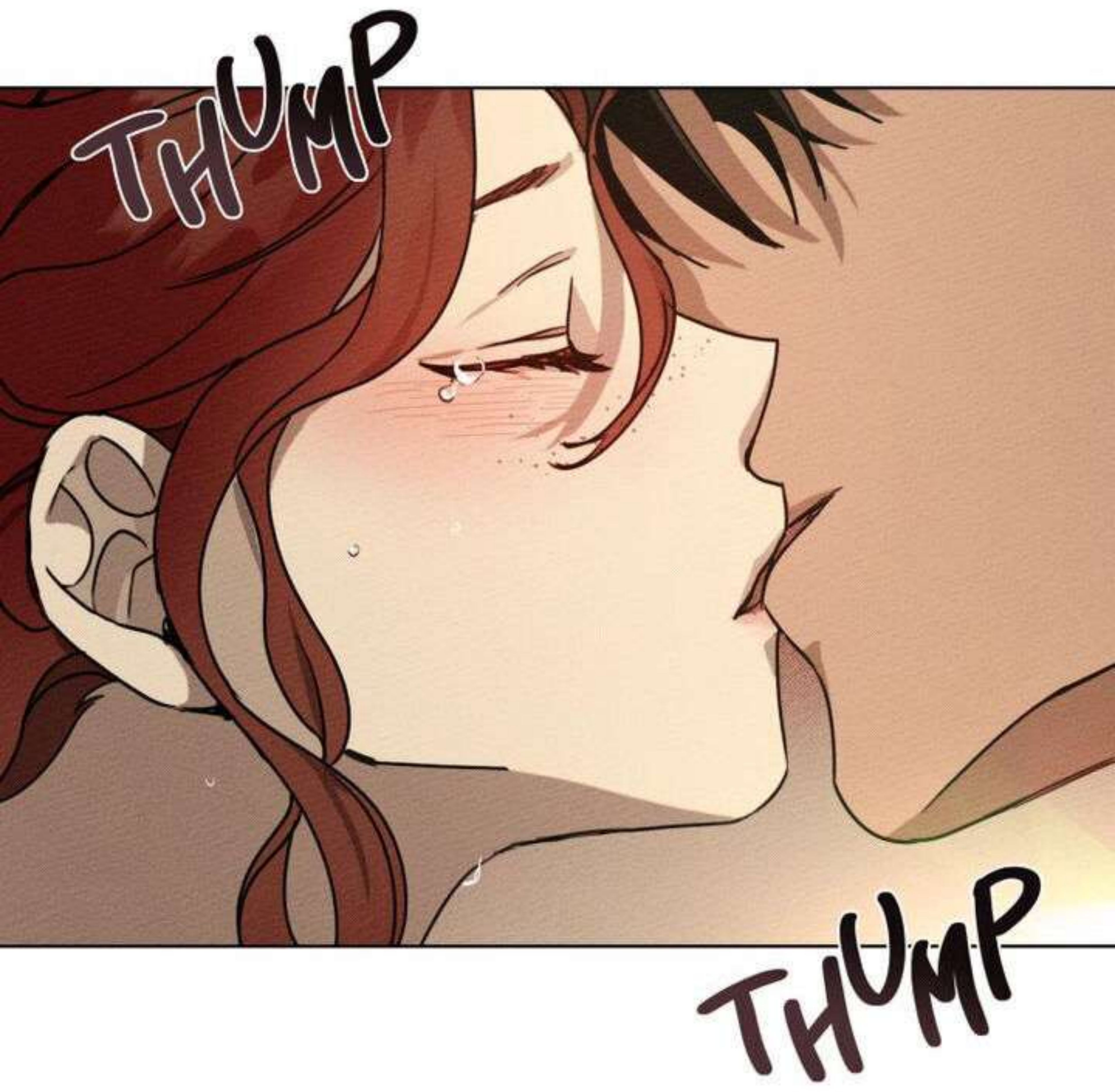

EEP!
PECK
HA—
...!

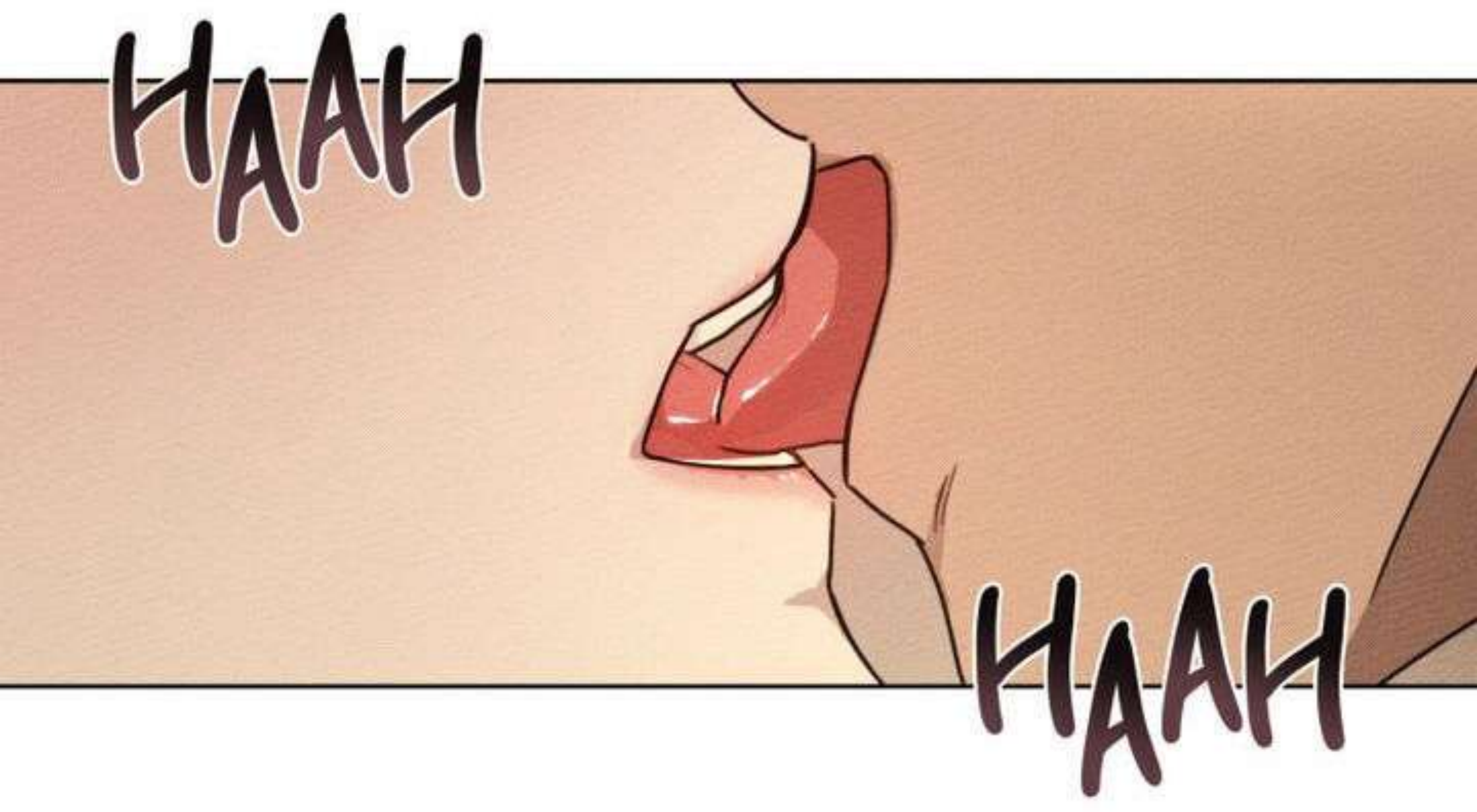

SAY MY NAME... RIFTAN....
HA..

R-


RIFTAN.


HAA... DAMN IT...
SHIVER


THUMP
THUMP



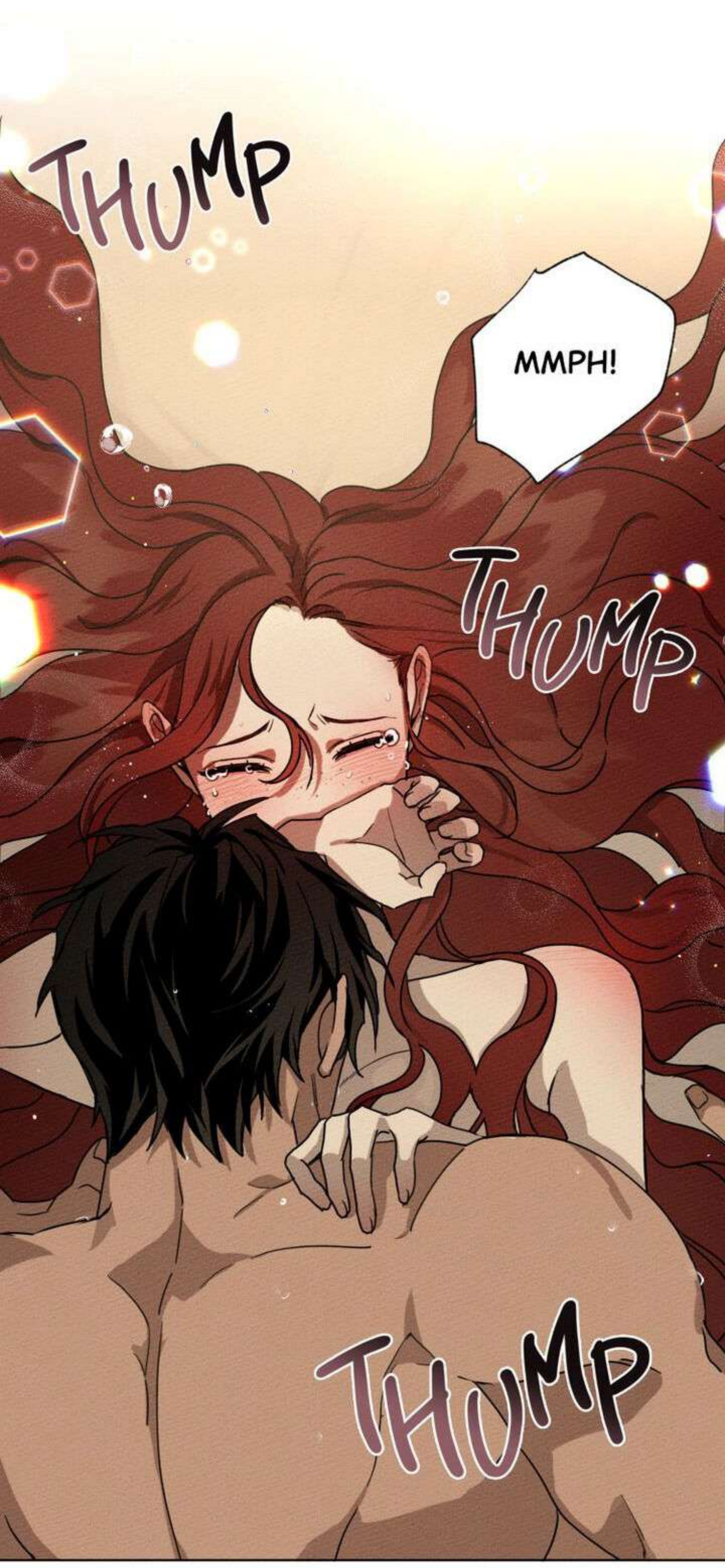
YOU'RE SO BEAUTIFUL, MAXI.

THIS IS STRANGE.
I CAN'T BREATHE.

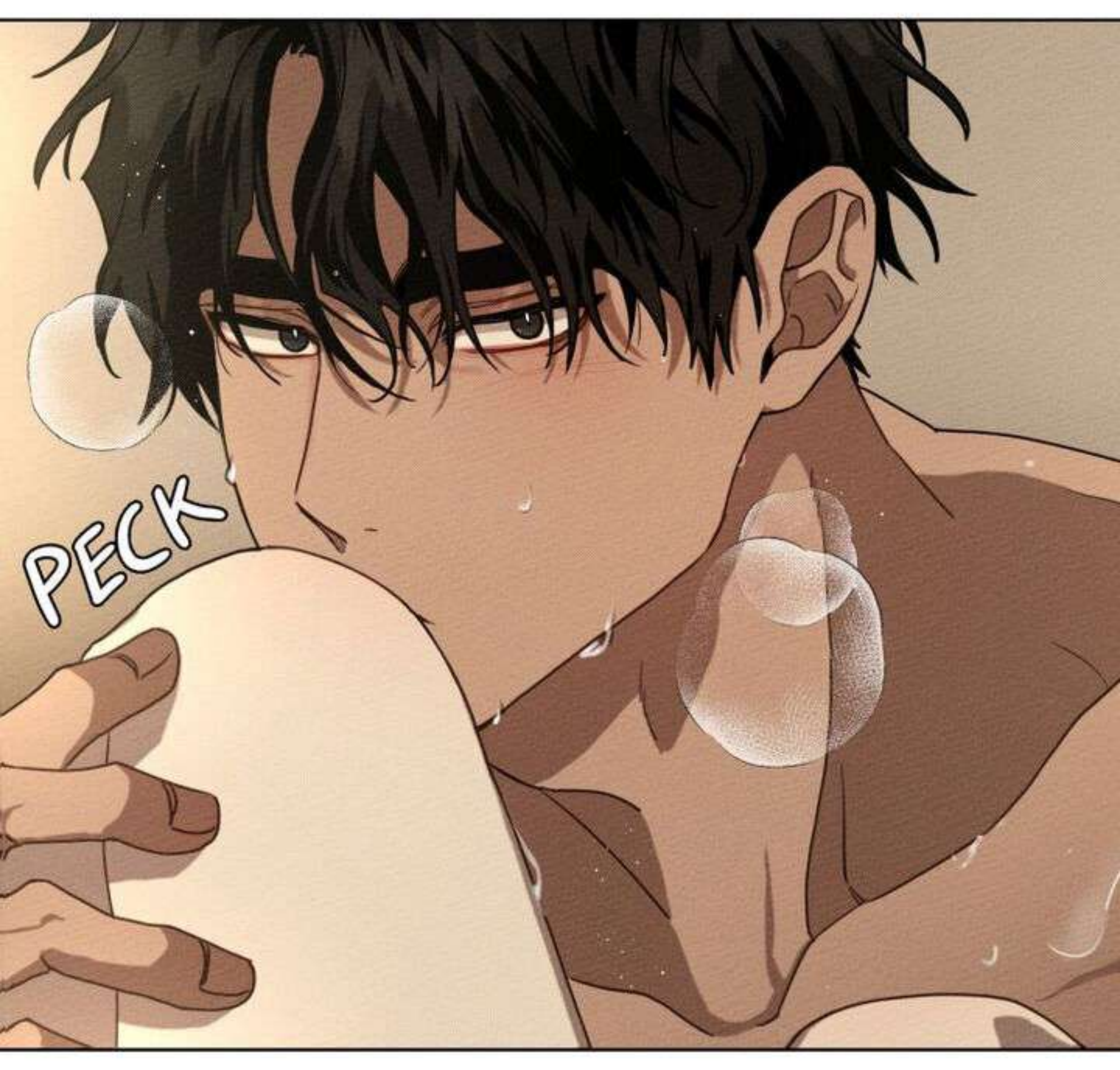
IT WASN'T LIKE THIS LAST TIME...

THIS ISN'T ME.

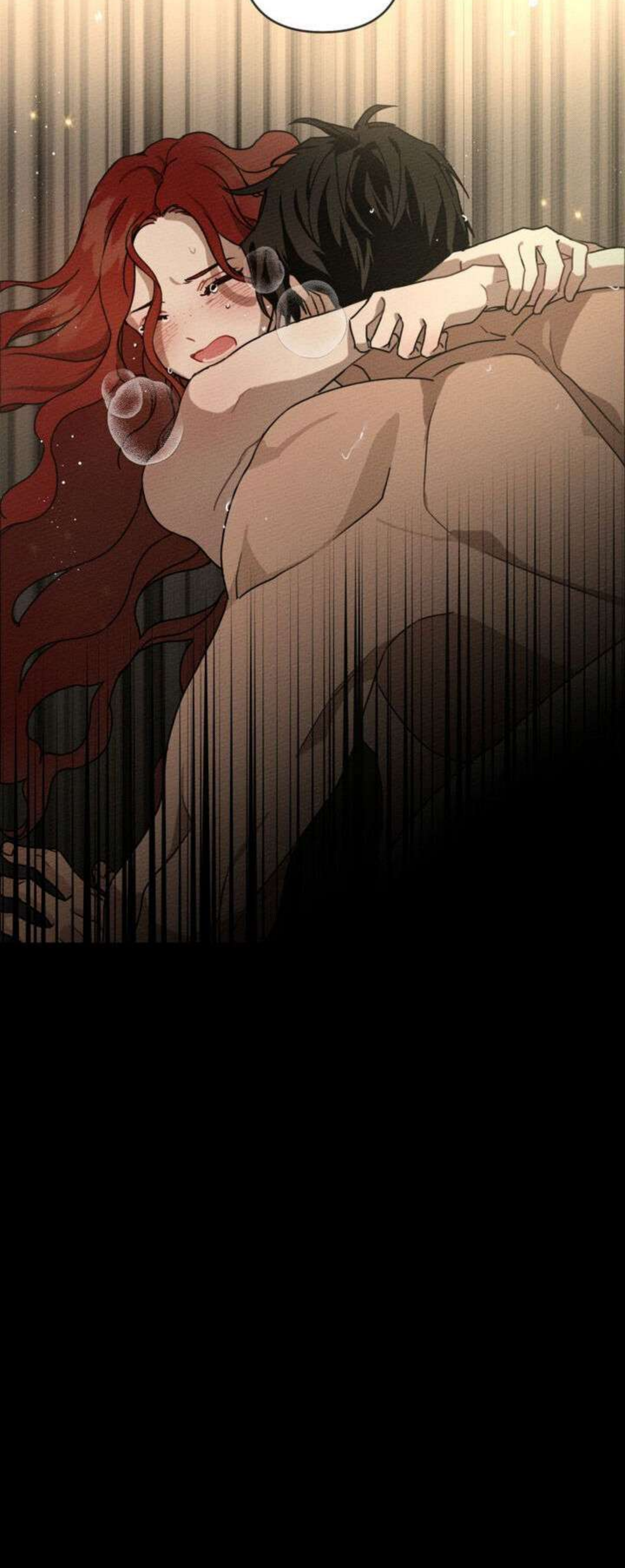
STRANGE, STRANGE, STRANGE.


THUMP
MMPH!
THUMP
THUMP

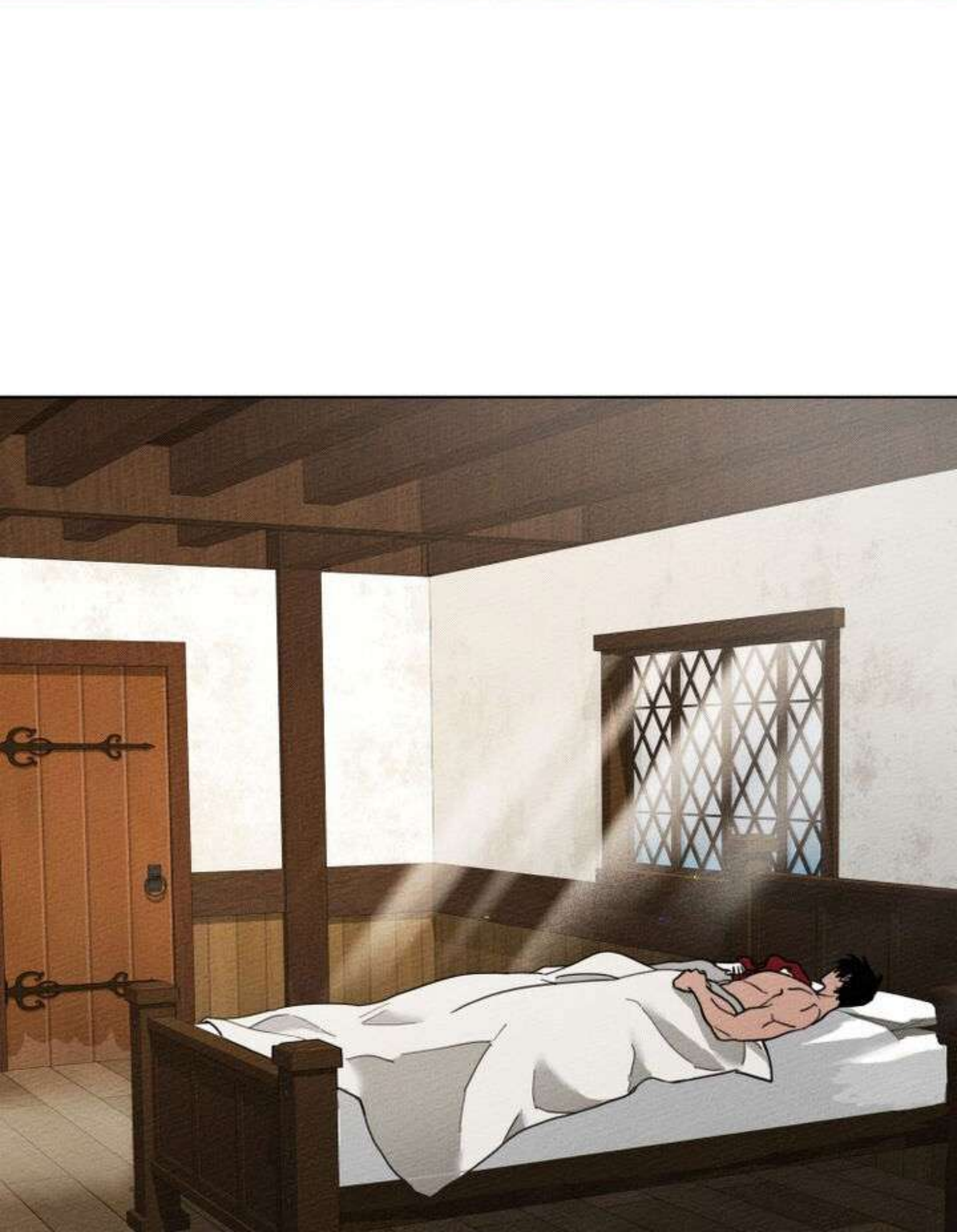
DON'T HOLD BACK. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIDE.
MAXI...


PECK
HOLD ME TIGHT. I'M NOT GOING TO HURT YOU.

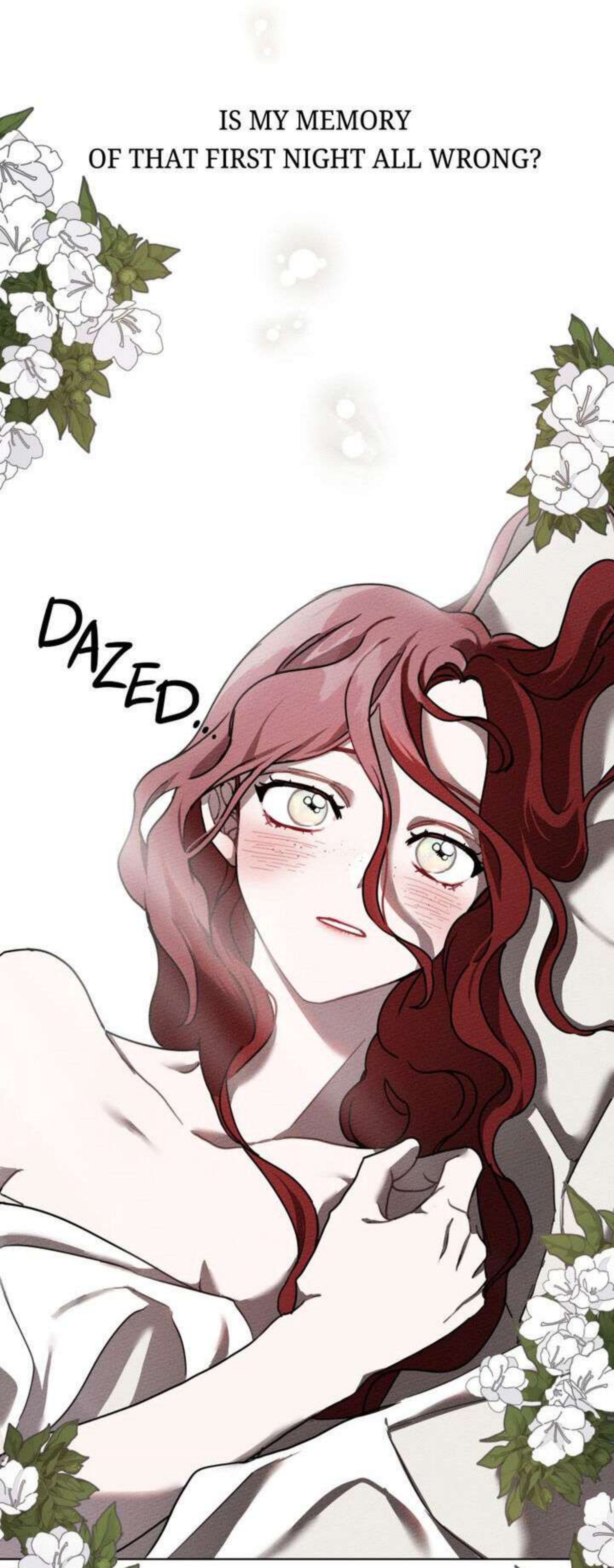
SQUEEZE..
AH!



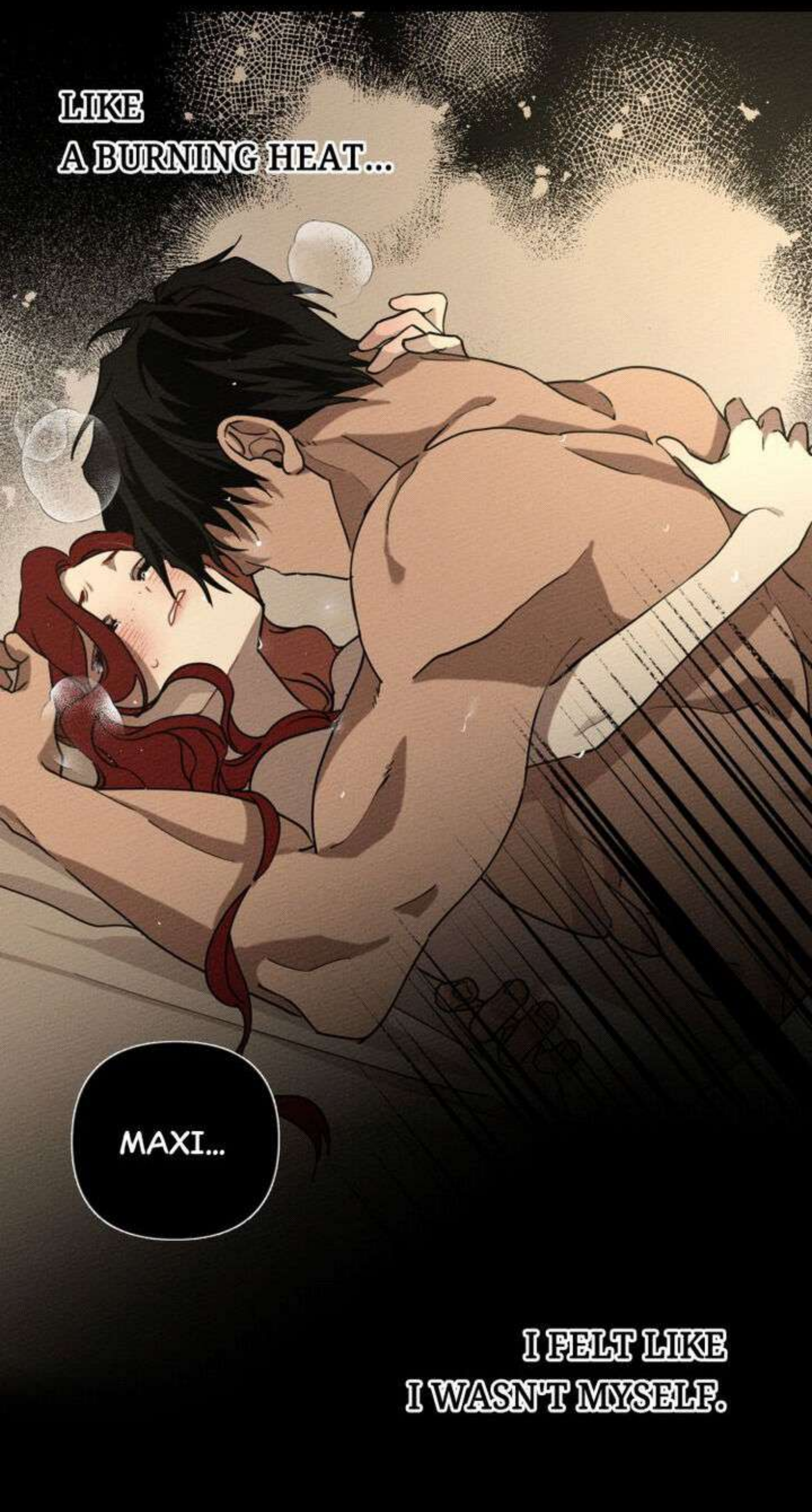
CHIRP CHIRP

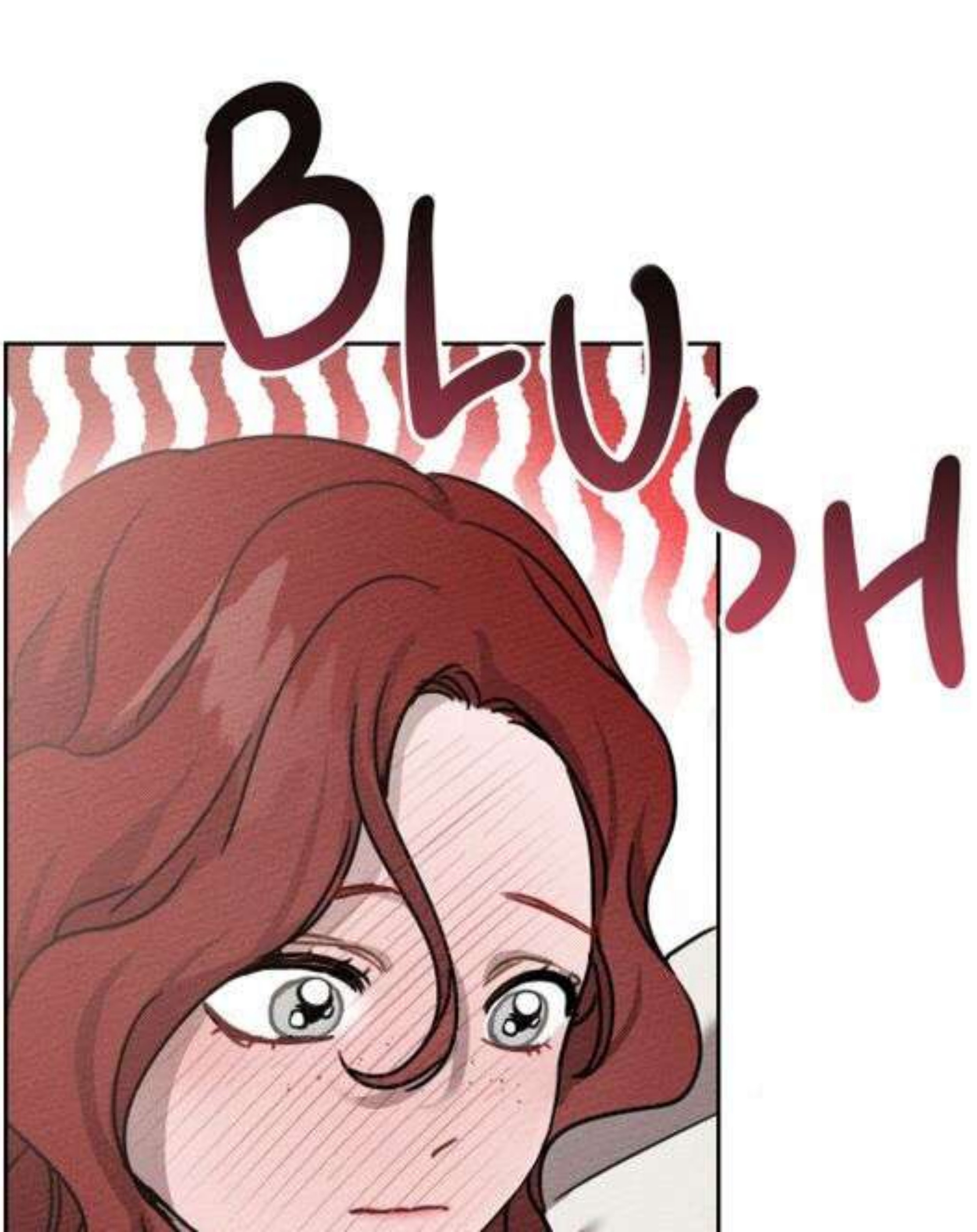


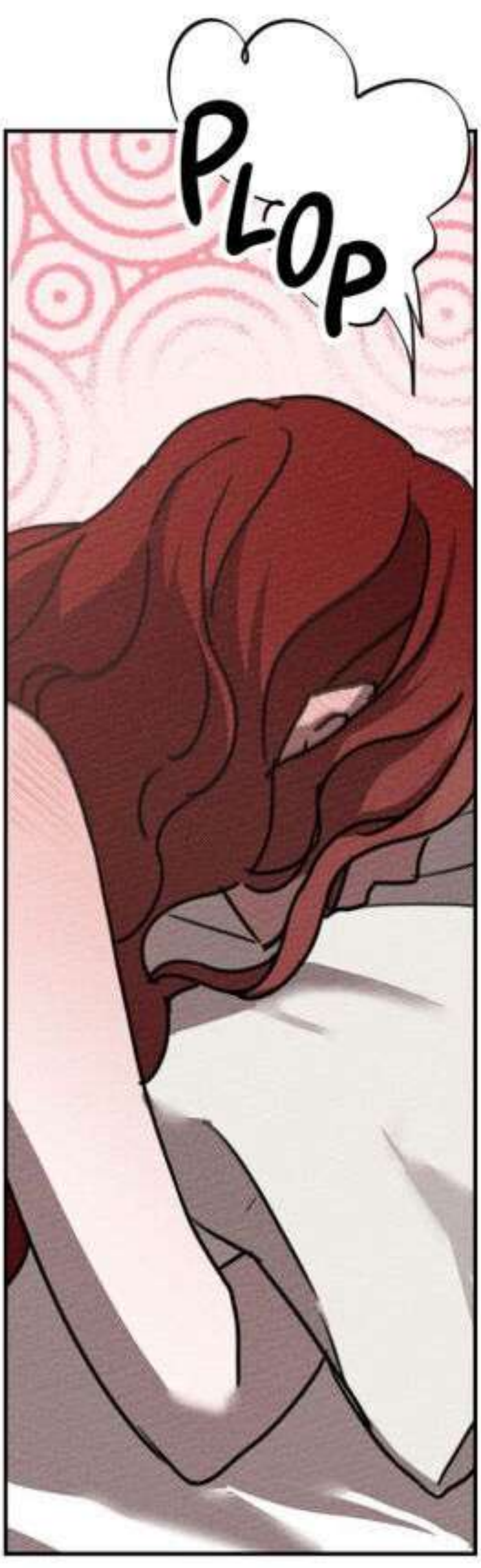
IS MY MEMORY
OF THAT FIRST NIGHT ALL WRONG?



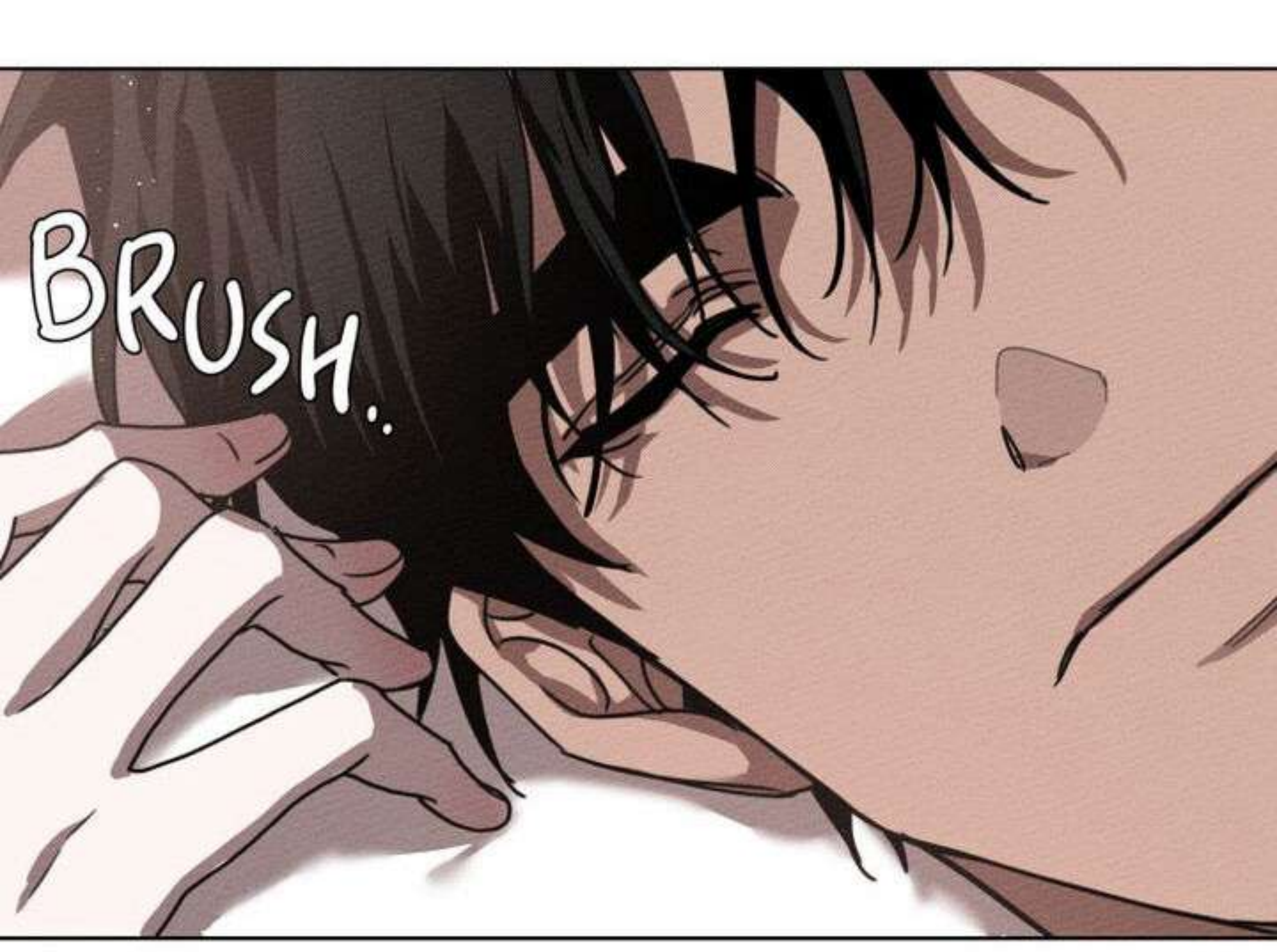
LAST NIGHT...
I DIDN'T FEEL PAIN...
IT WAS...


LIKE
A BURNING HEAT...
MAXI...
I FELT LIKE
I WASN'T MYSELF.

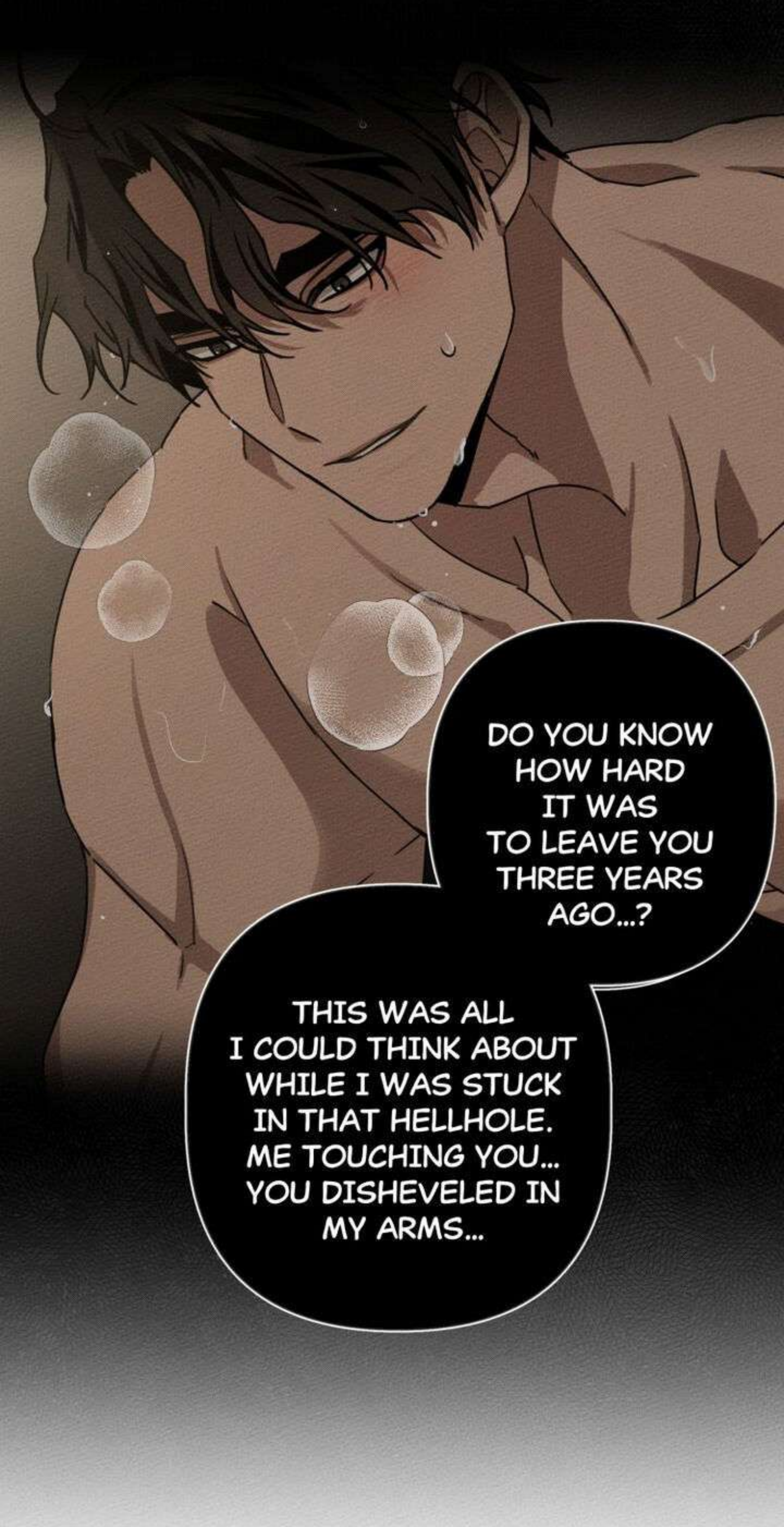

BLUSH


PLOP
IN FACT, I LIKED IT...

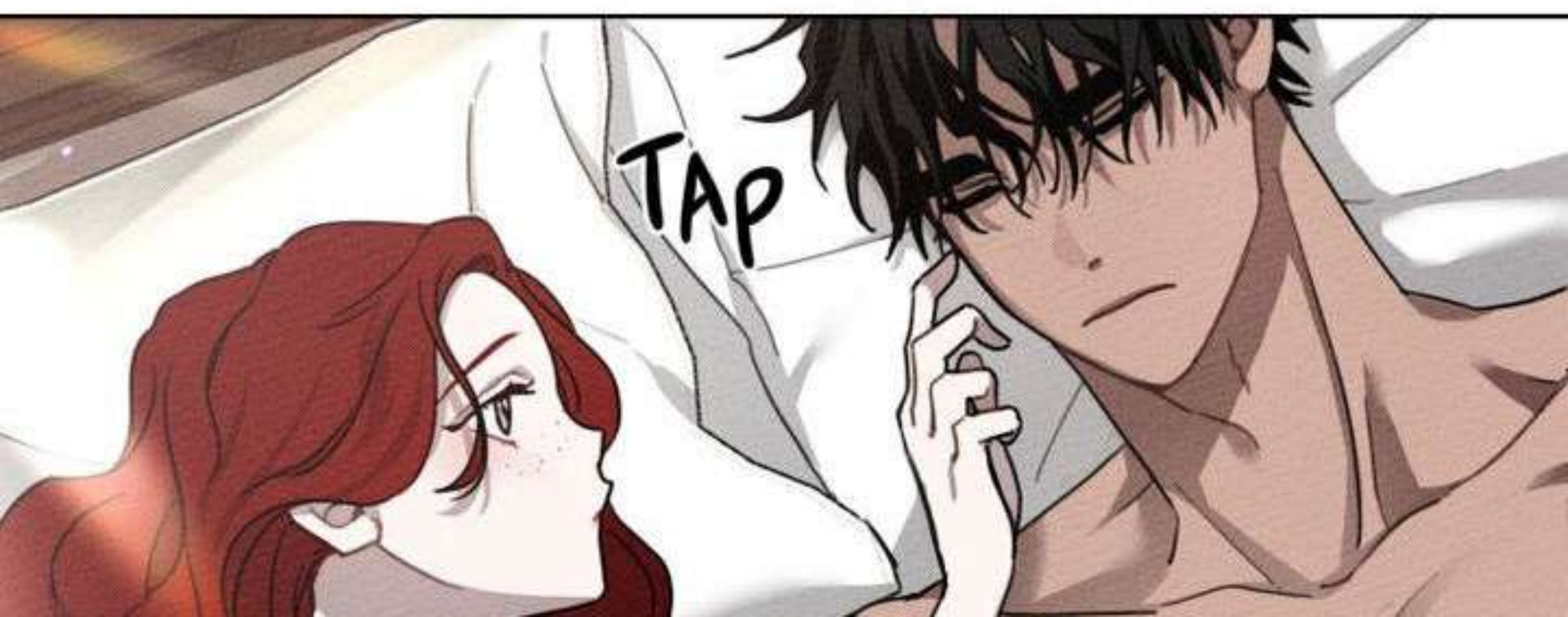
HE LOOKED SO DISTRESSED YESTERDAY...



BUT HE LOOKS LIKE AN INNOCENT CHILD IN HIS SLEEP.

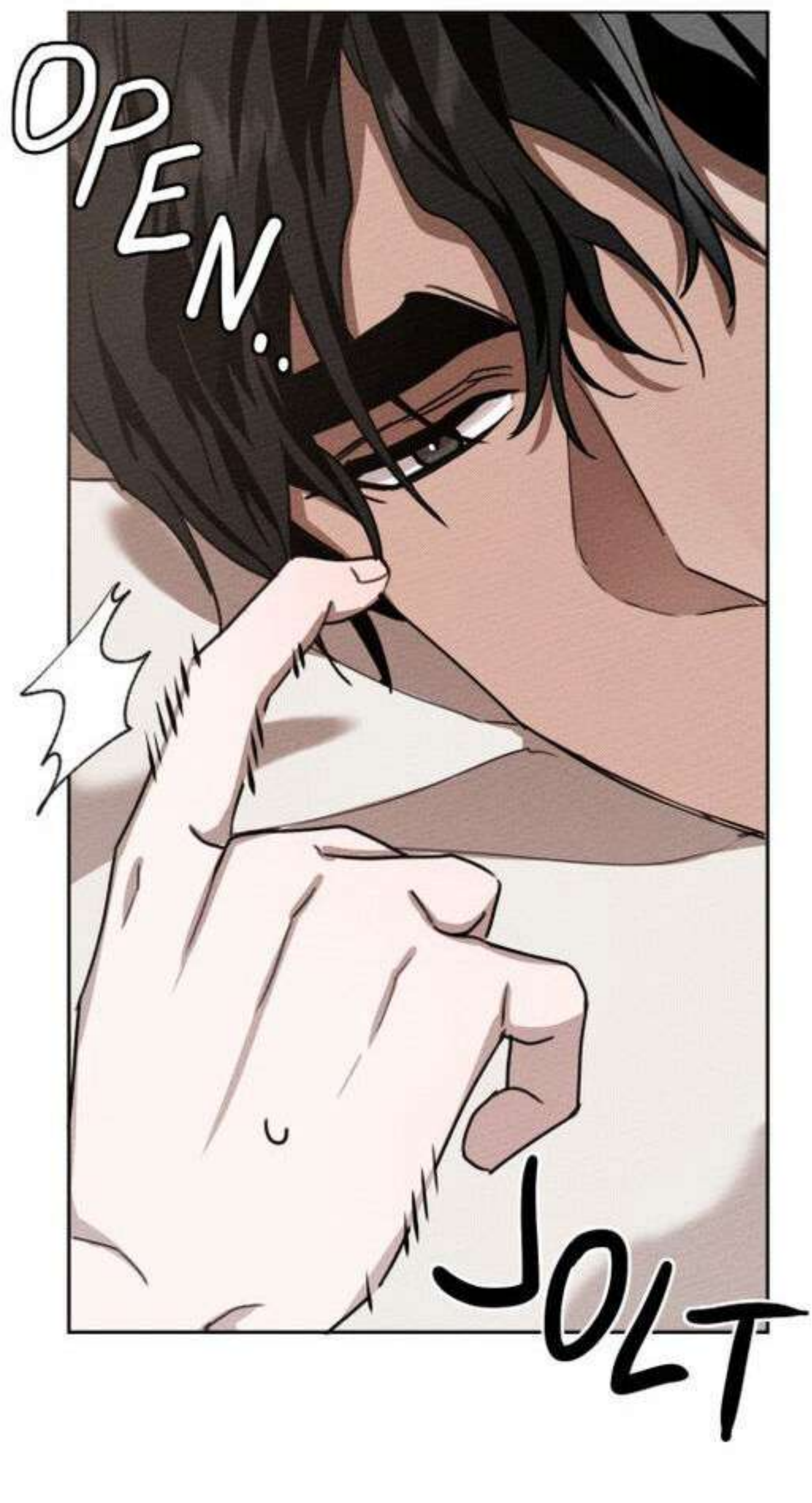

DO YOU KNOW HOW HARD IT WAS TO LEAVE YOU THREE YEARS AGO...?
THIS WAS ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WHILE I WAS STUCK IN THAT HELLHOLE. ME TOUCHING YOU... YOU DISHEVELED IN MY ARMS...

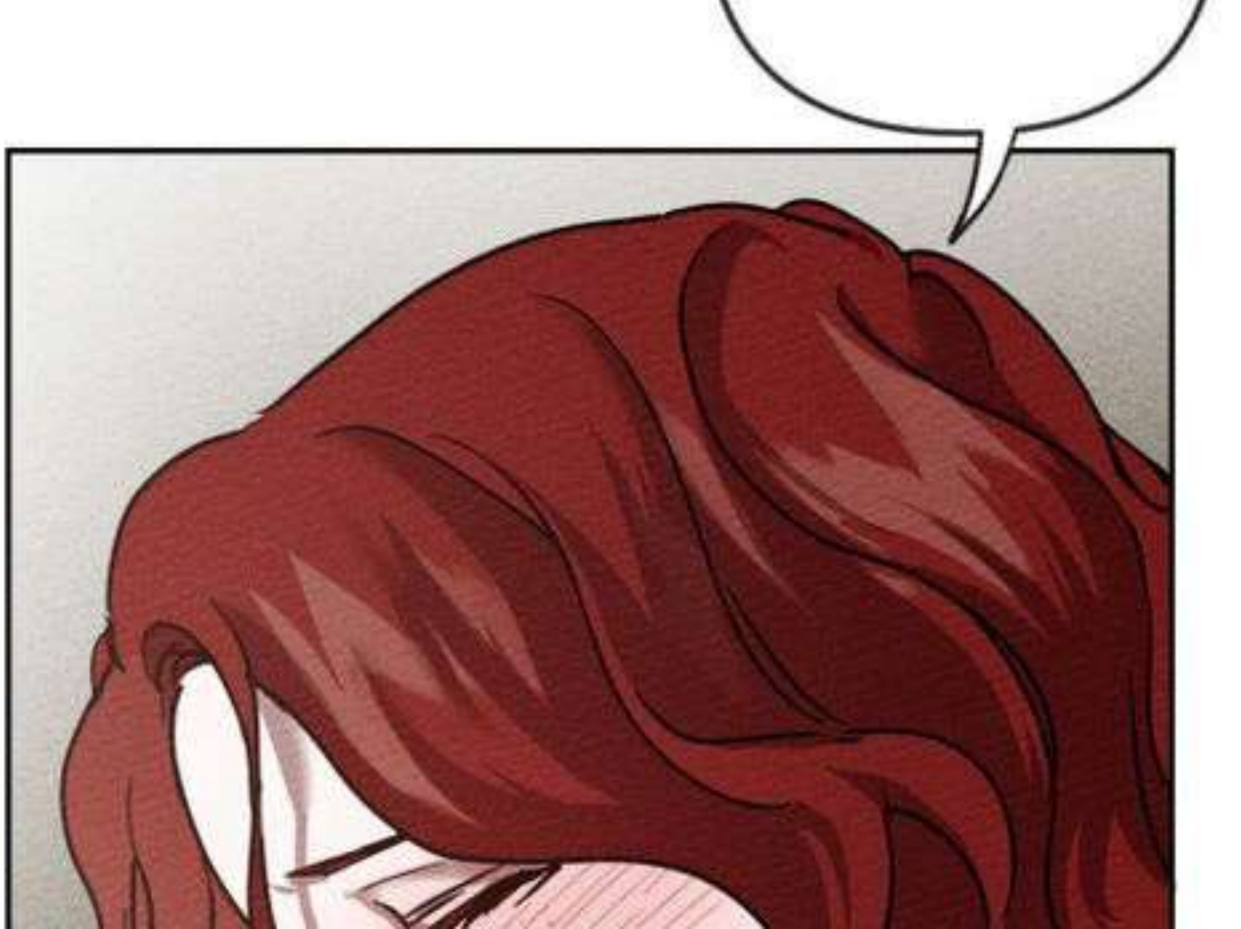
IS THAT TRUE?
WAS IT REALLY
HARD FOR HIM
TO LEAVE ME
THAT NIGHT...?

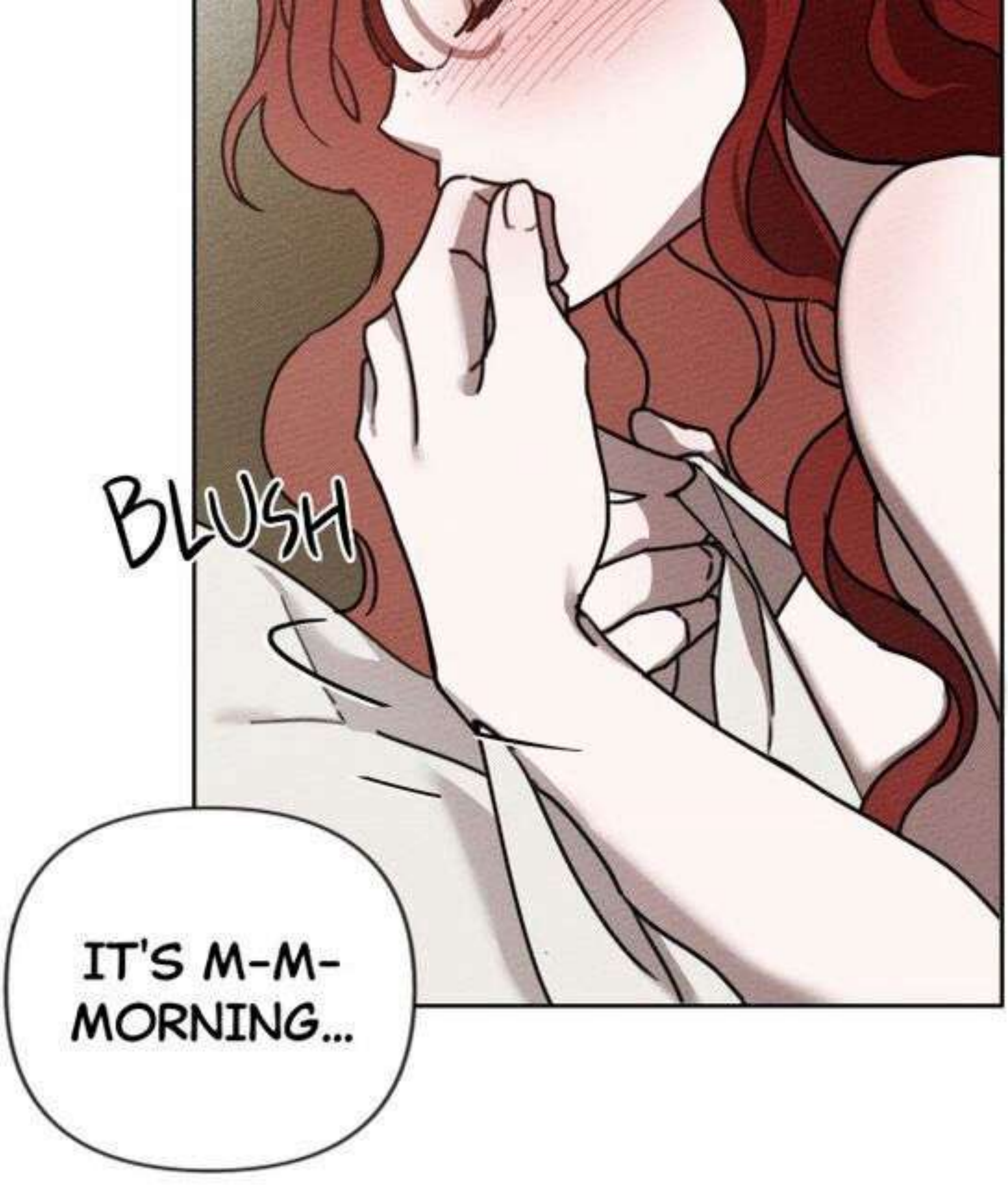


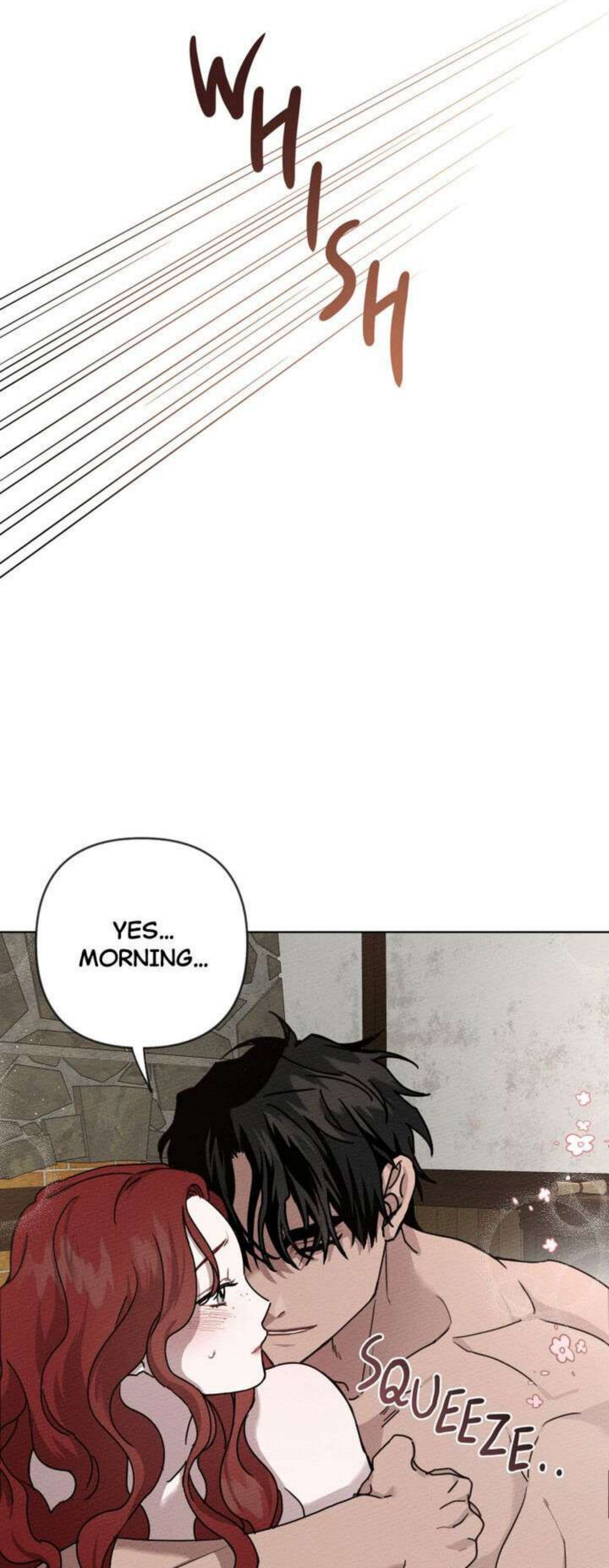
HE LIKES ME.
HOW STRANGE.

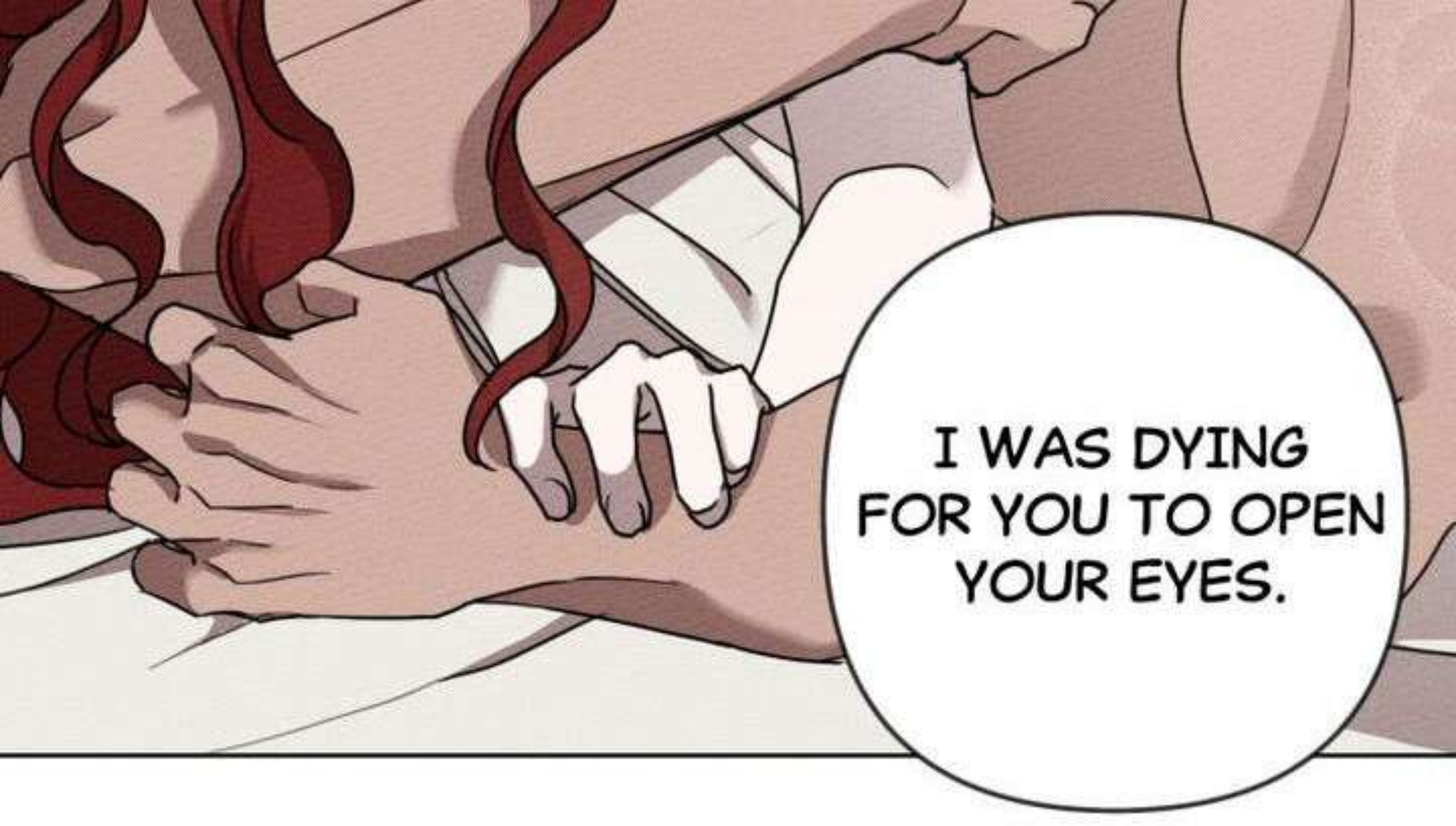
THIS SHOULD
BE NOTHING
BUT A FORCED
MARRIAGE
TO HIM.

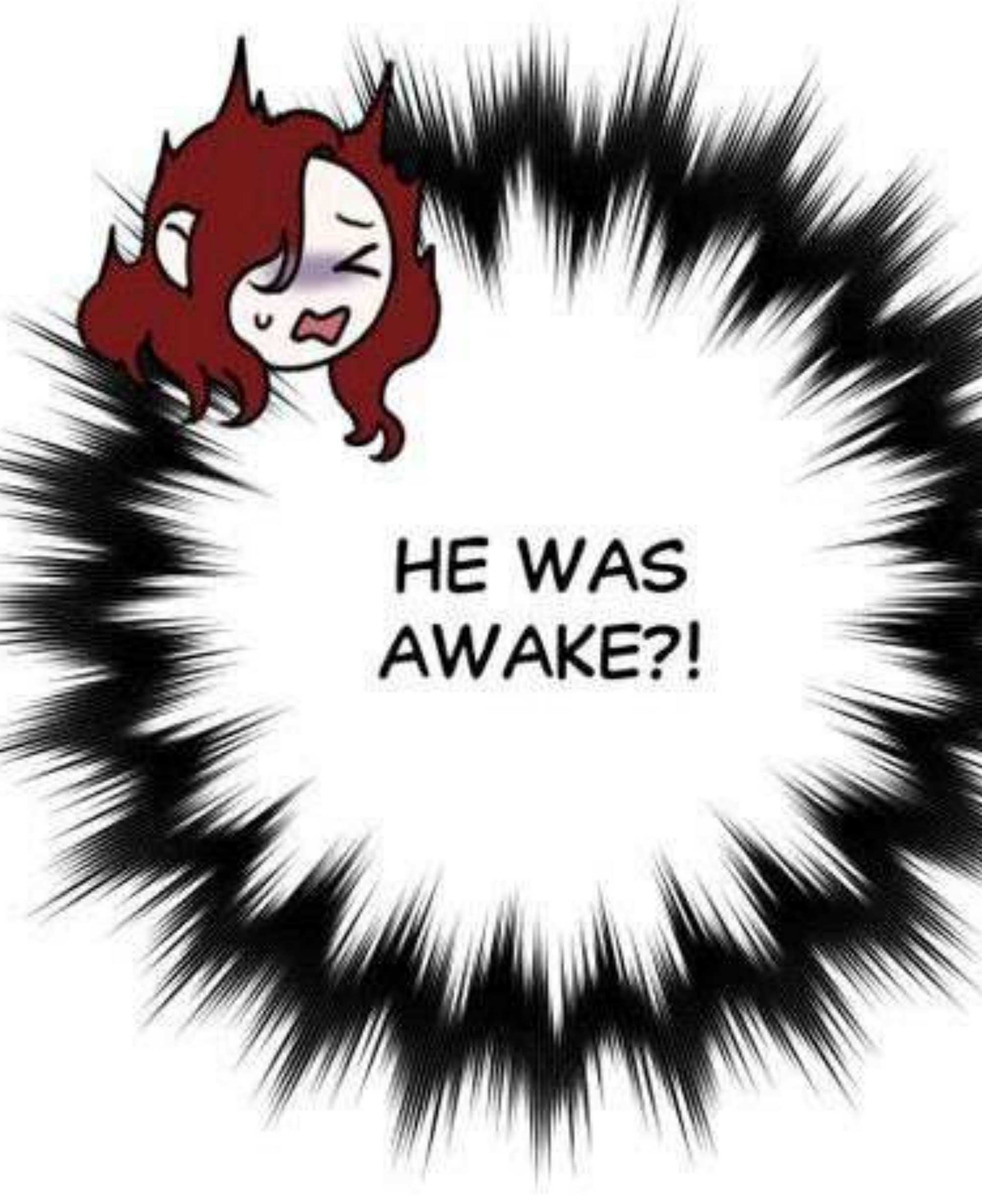


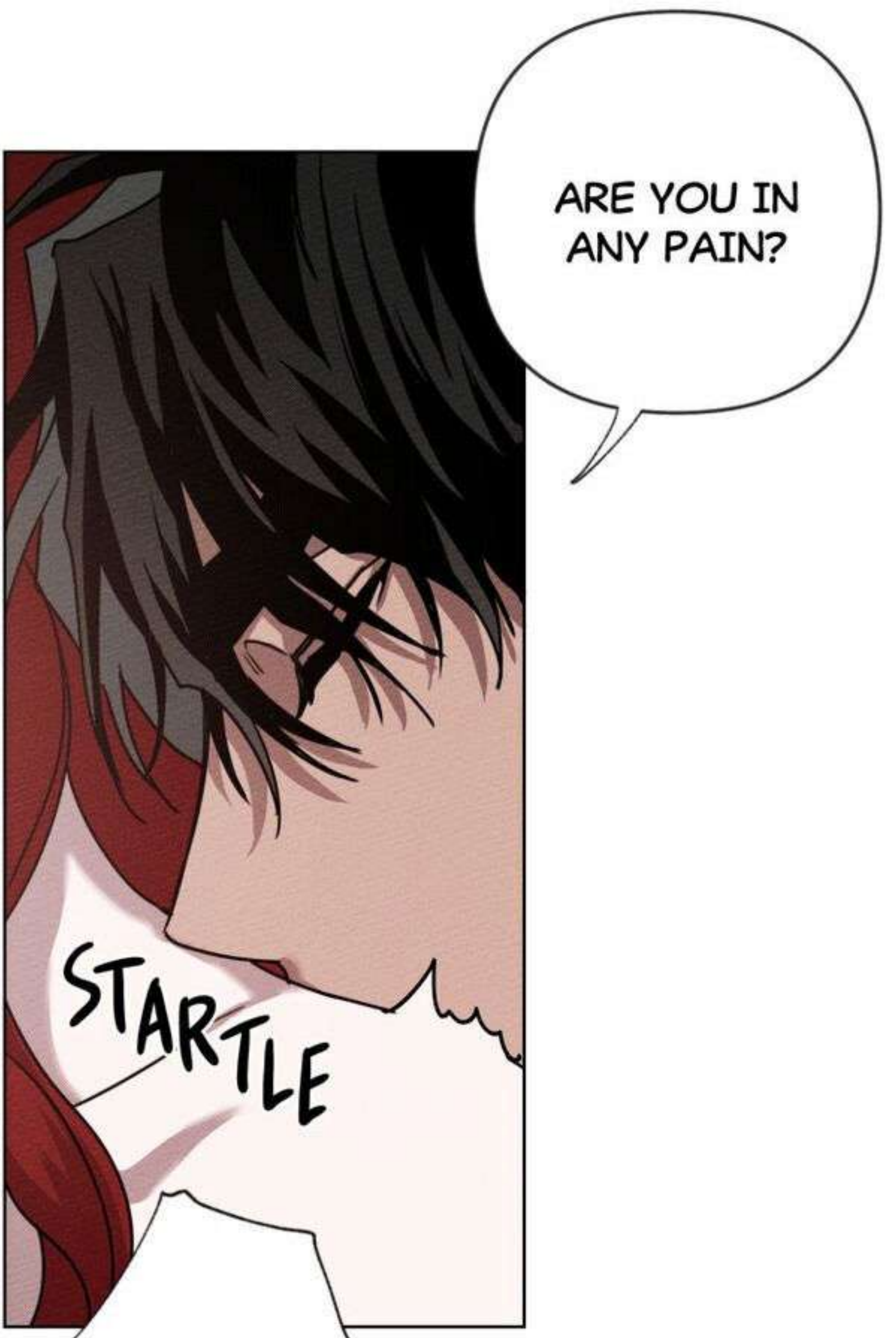


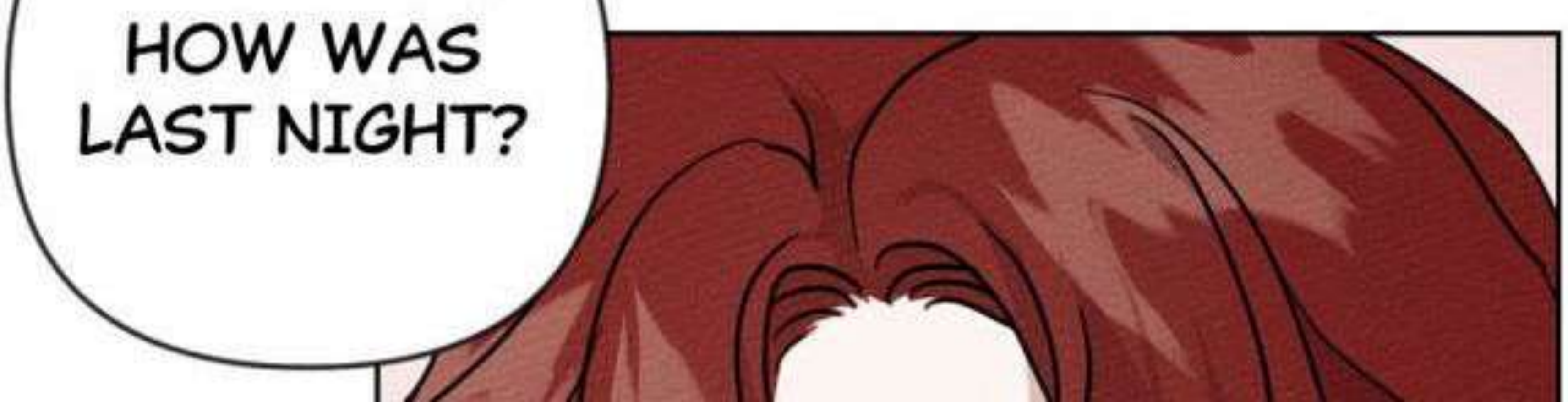

BLUSH
IT'S M-M-MORNING...

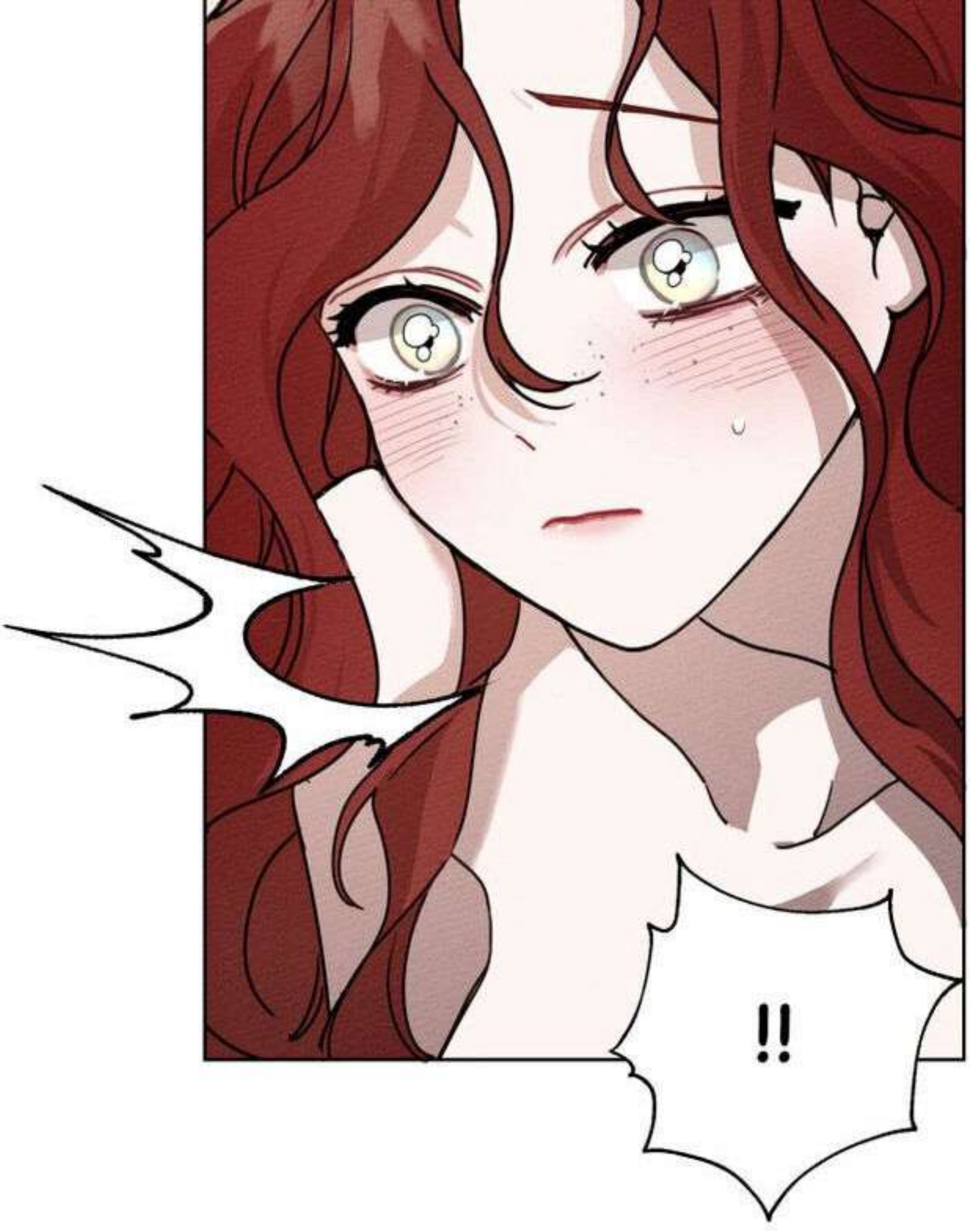

WHISH
YES... MORNING...
SQUEEZE..

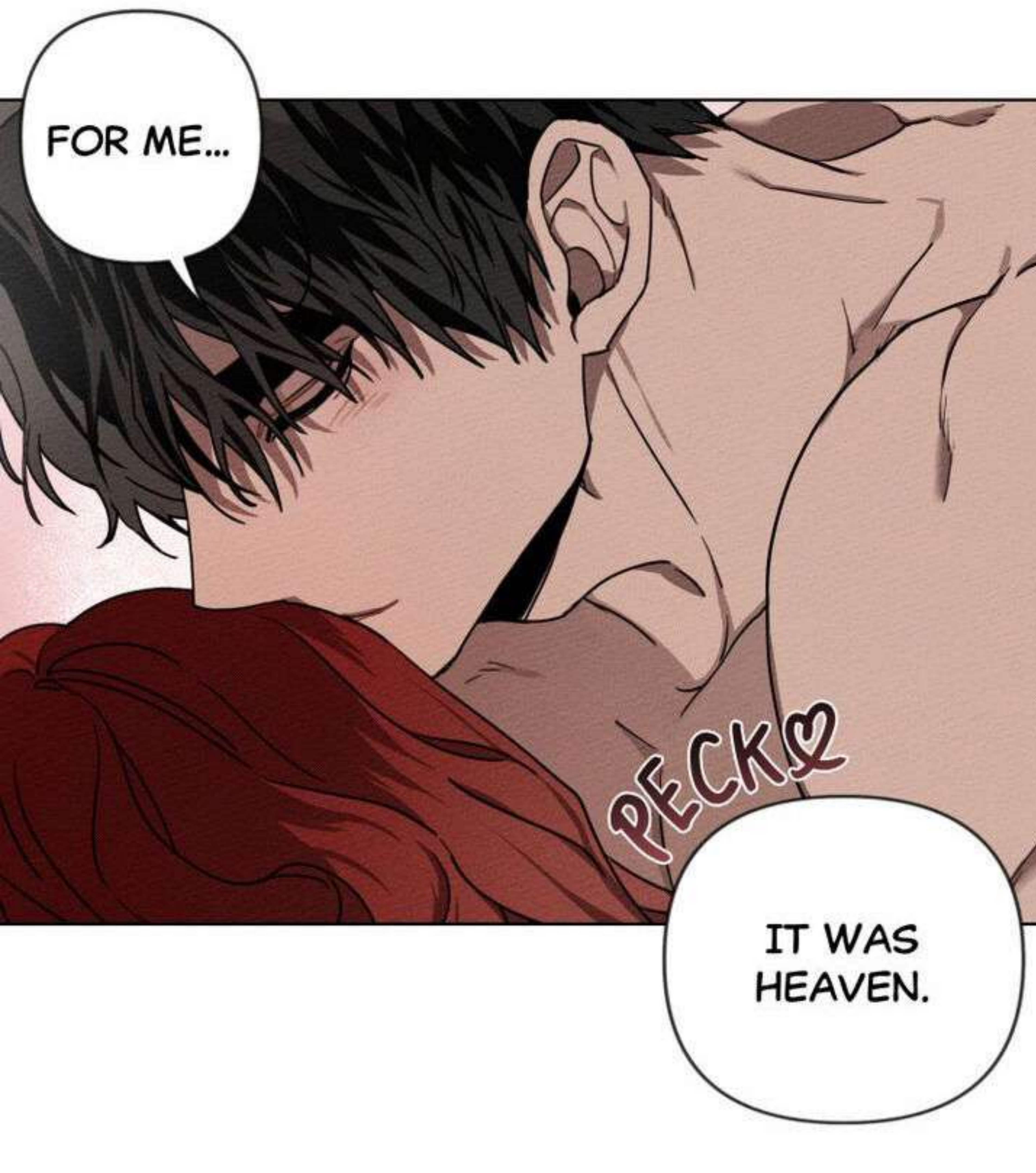

I WAS DYING FOR YOU TO OPEN YOUR EYES.

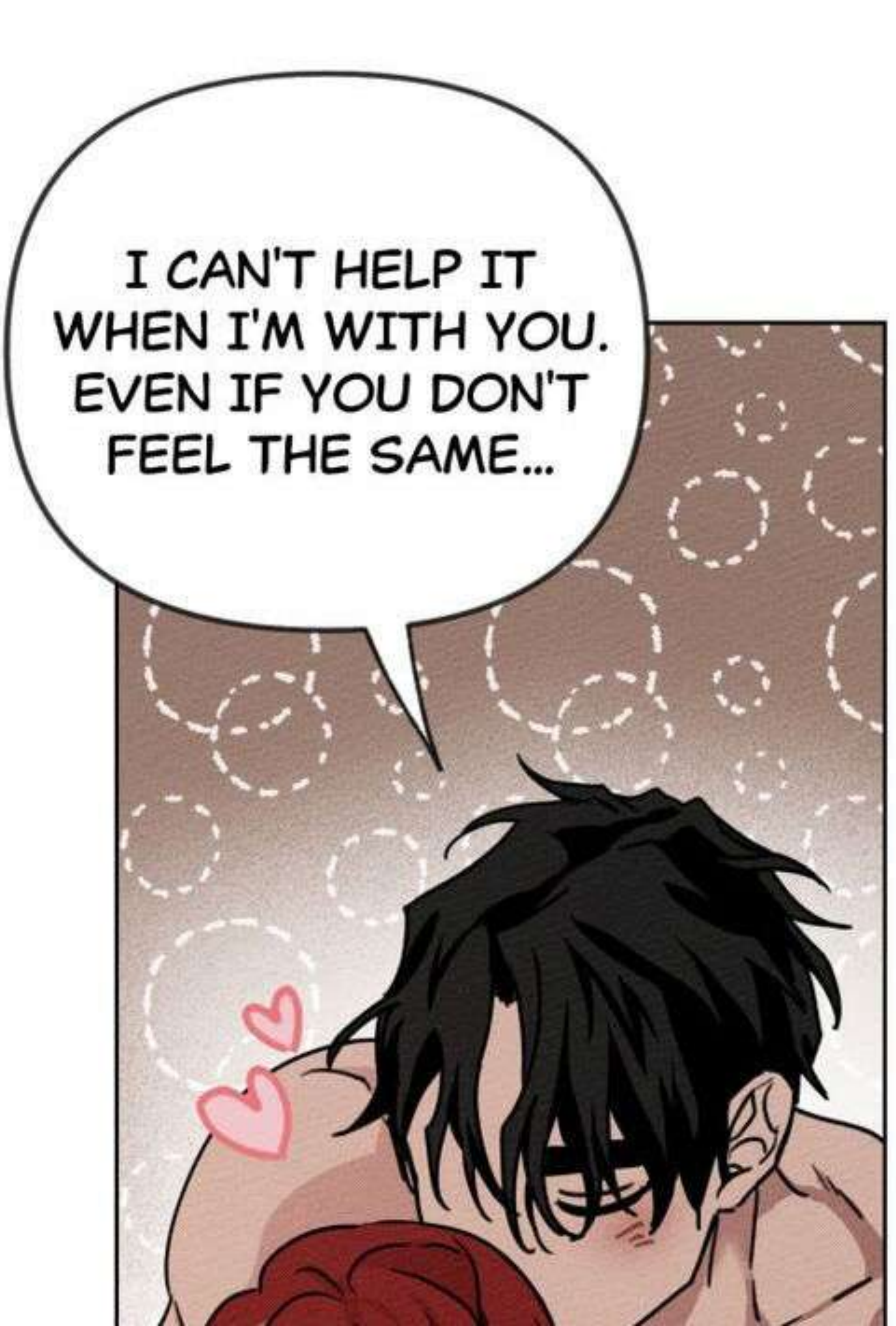

HE WAS AWAKE?!

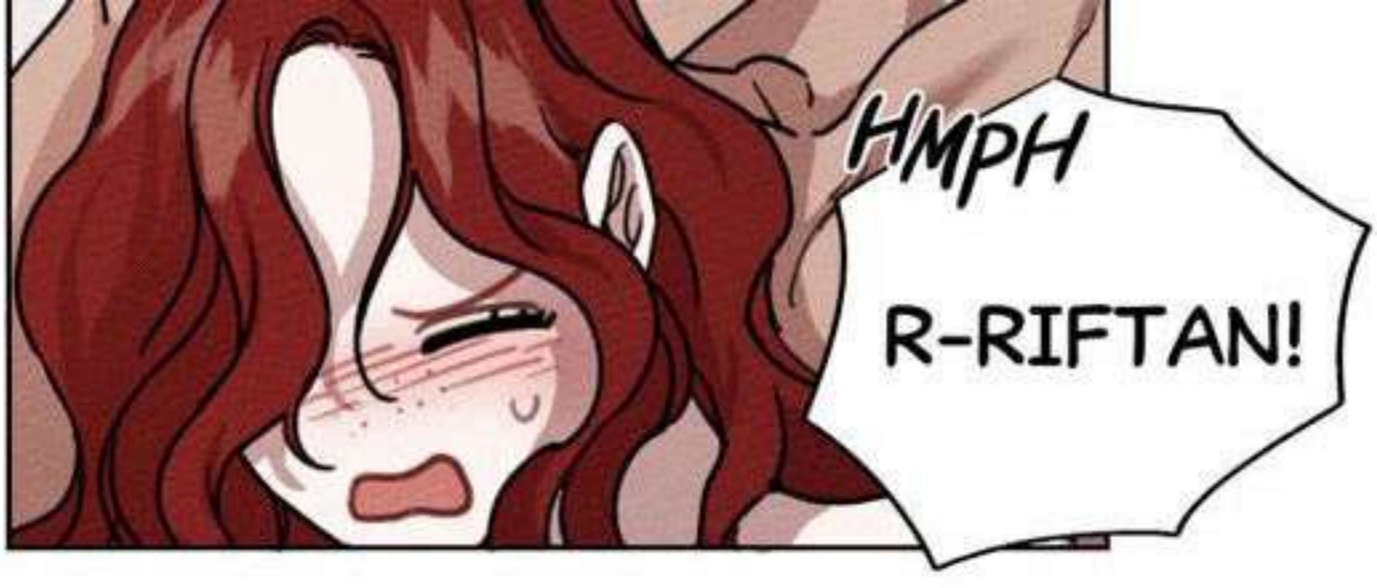

ARE YOU IN ANY PAIN?
STARTLE
N-NO!

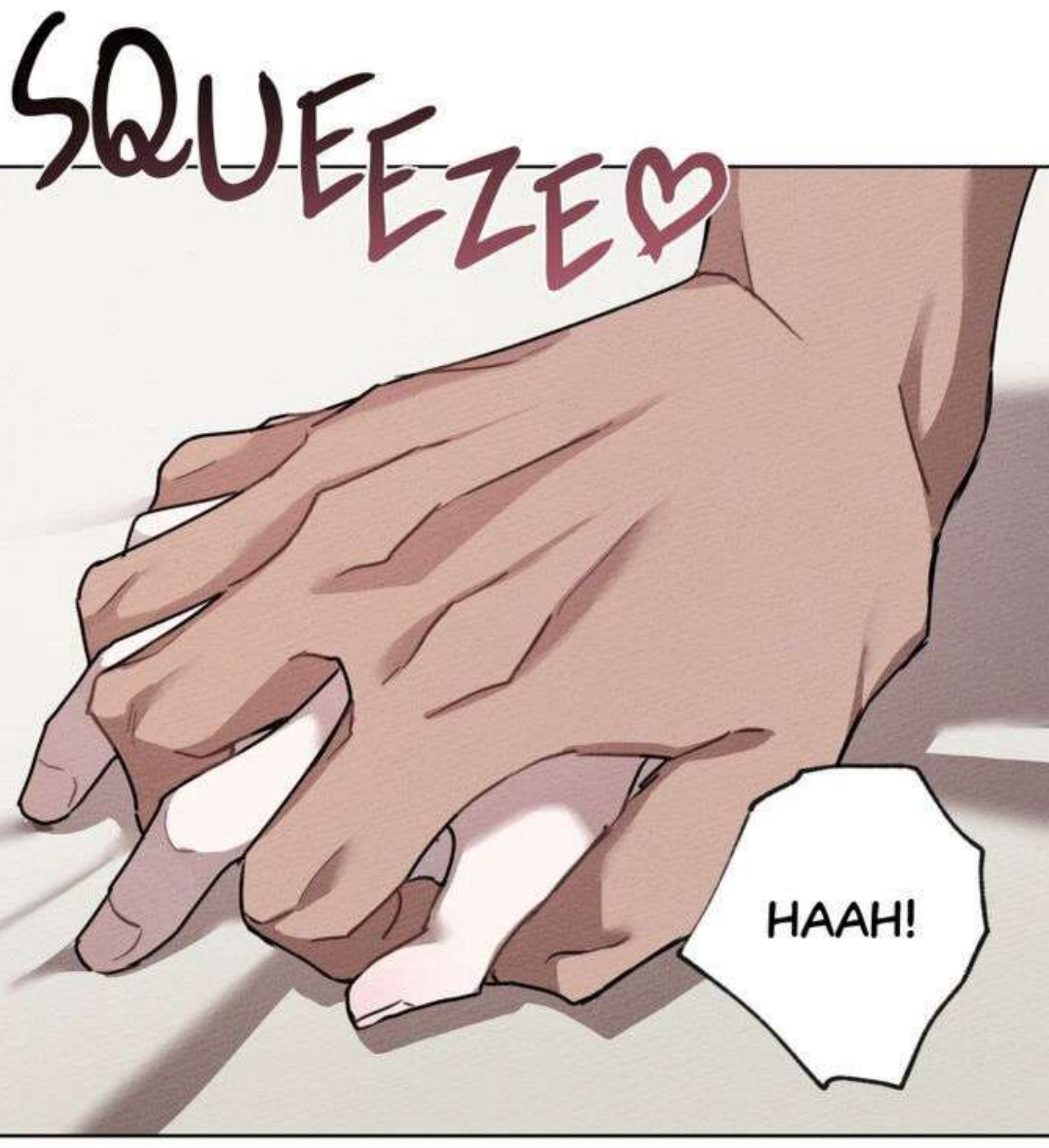

HOW WAS LAST NIGHT?


!!

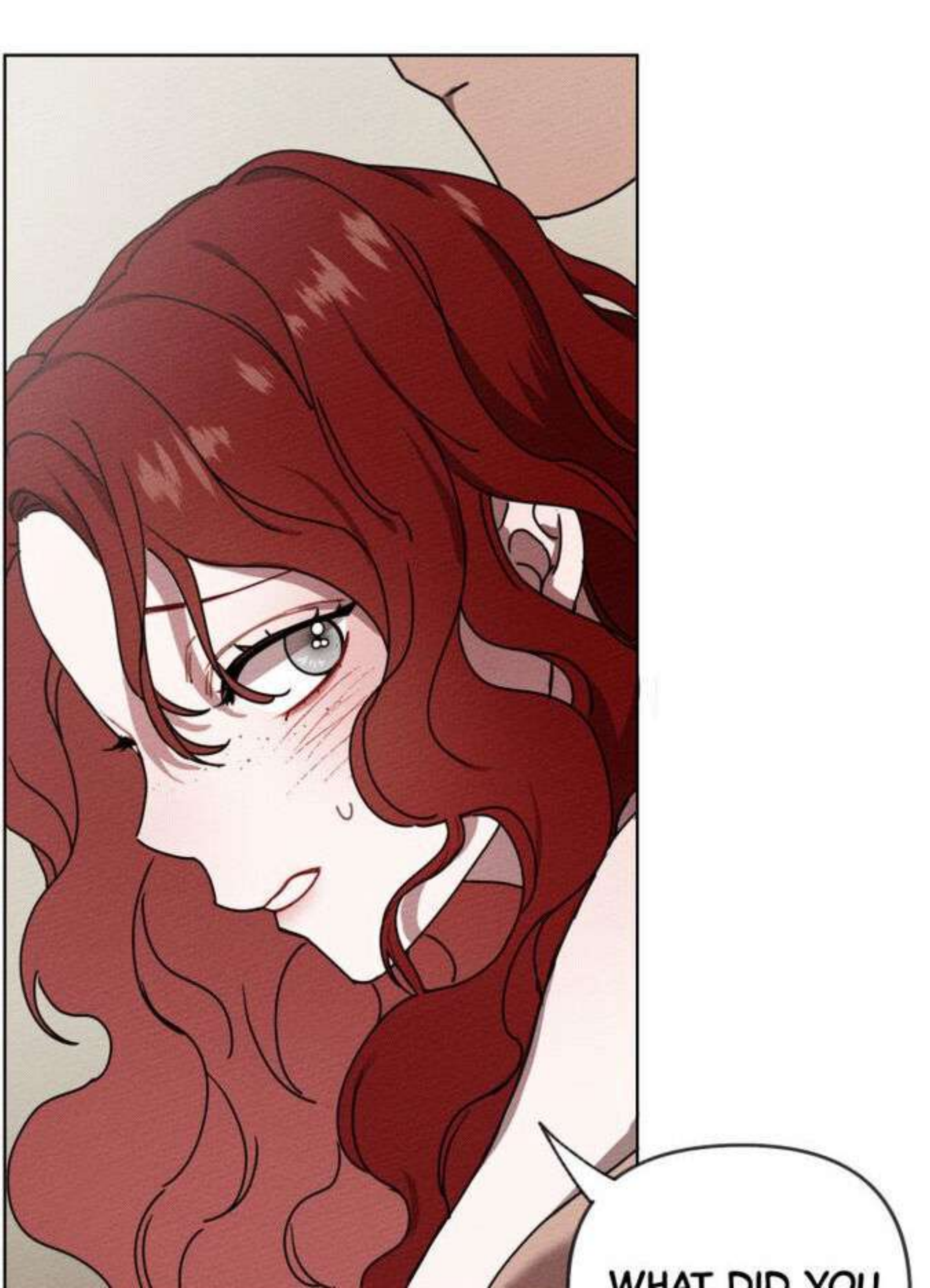

FOR ME...
PECK♡
IT WAS HEAVEN.


I CAN'T HELP IT WHEN I'M WITH YOU. EVEN IF YOU DON'T FEEL THE SAME...

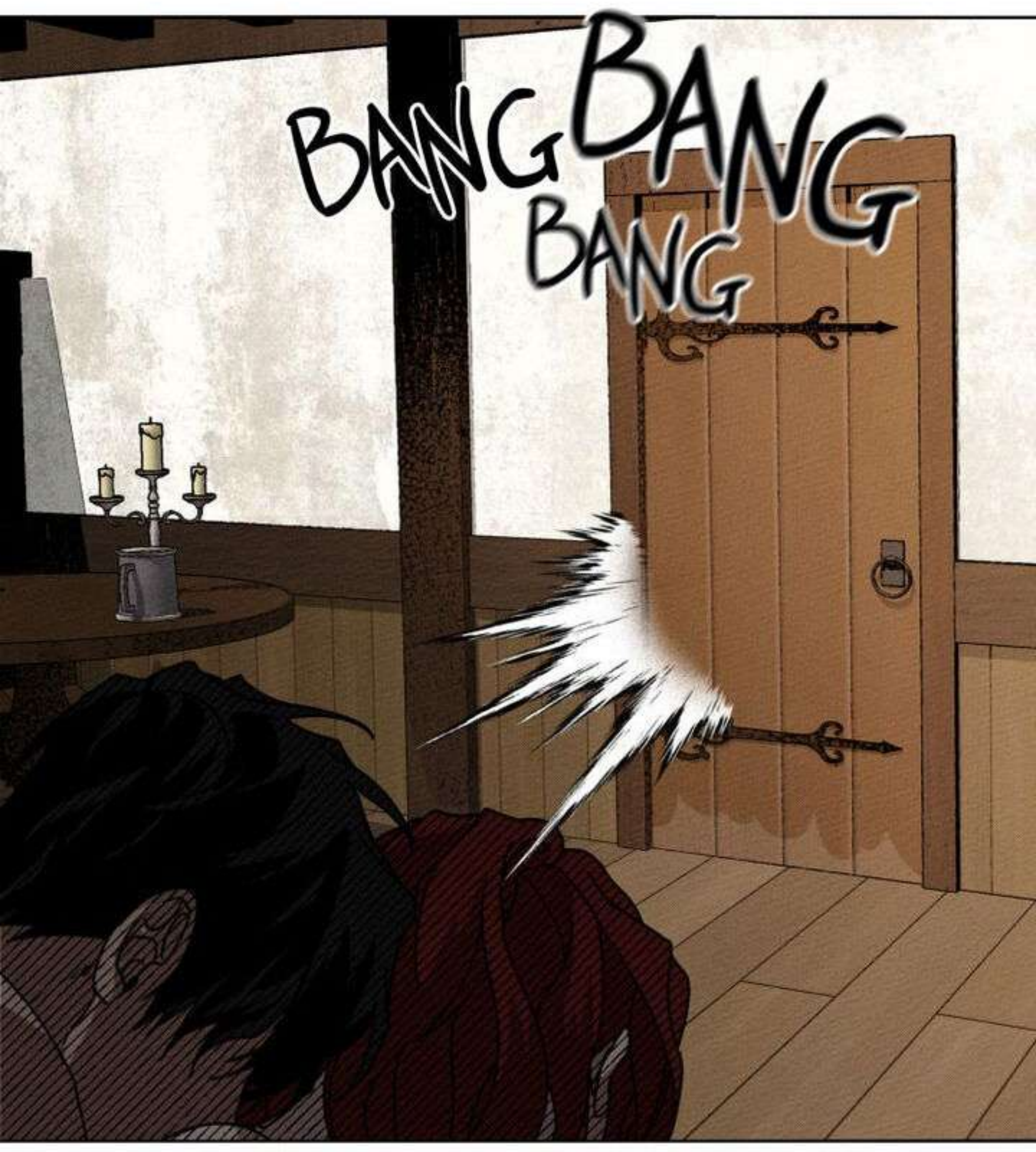

HMPH
R-RIFTAN!


SQUEEZE
HAAH!

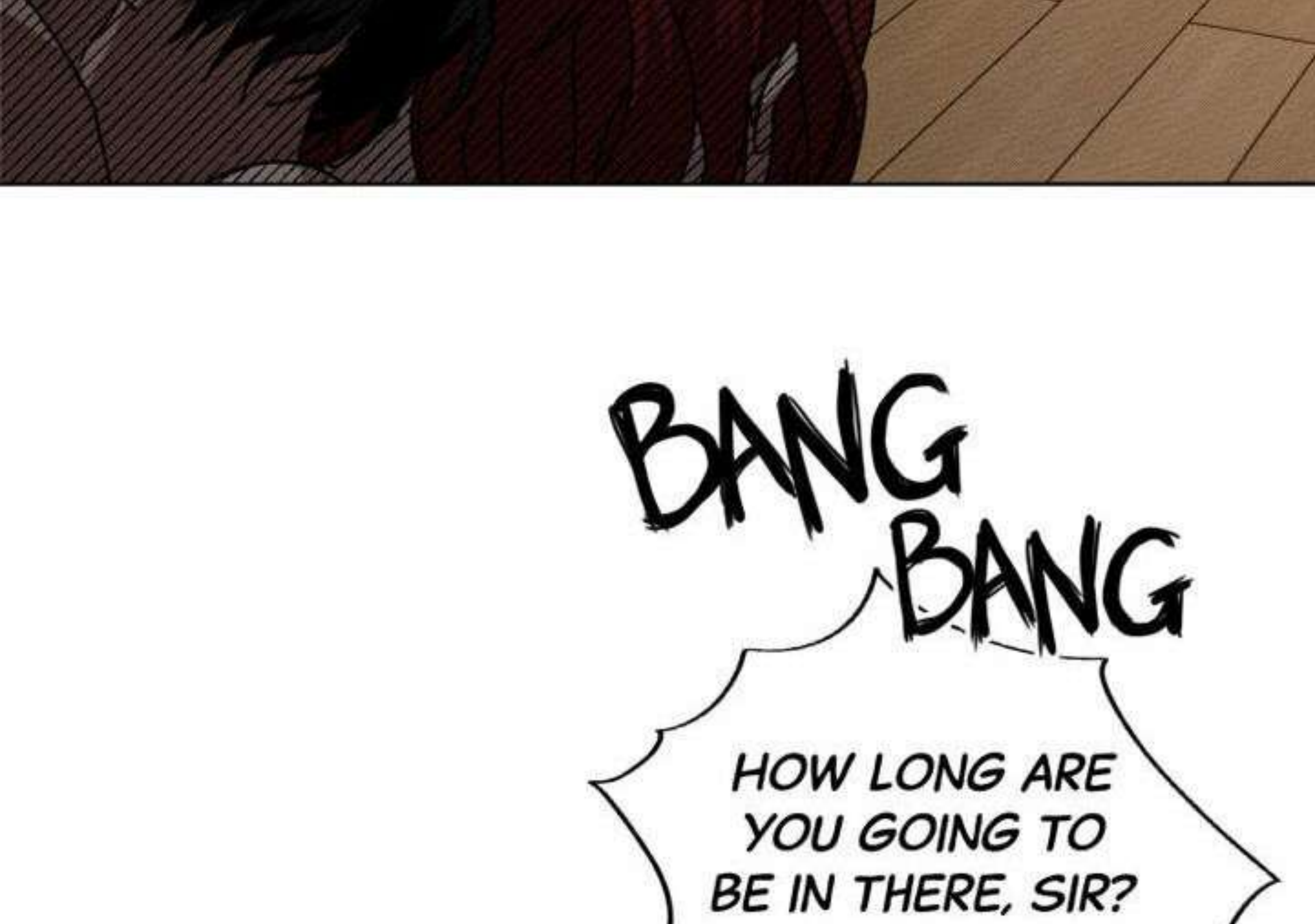
IT IS YOUR BAD LUCK, BEING THE WIFE OF A MAN LIKE ME.

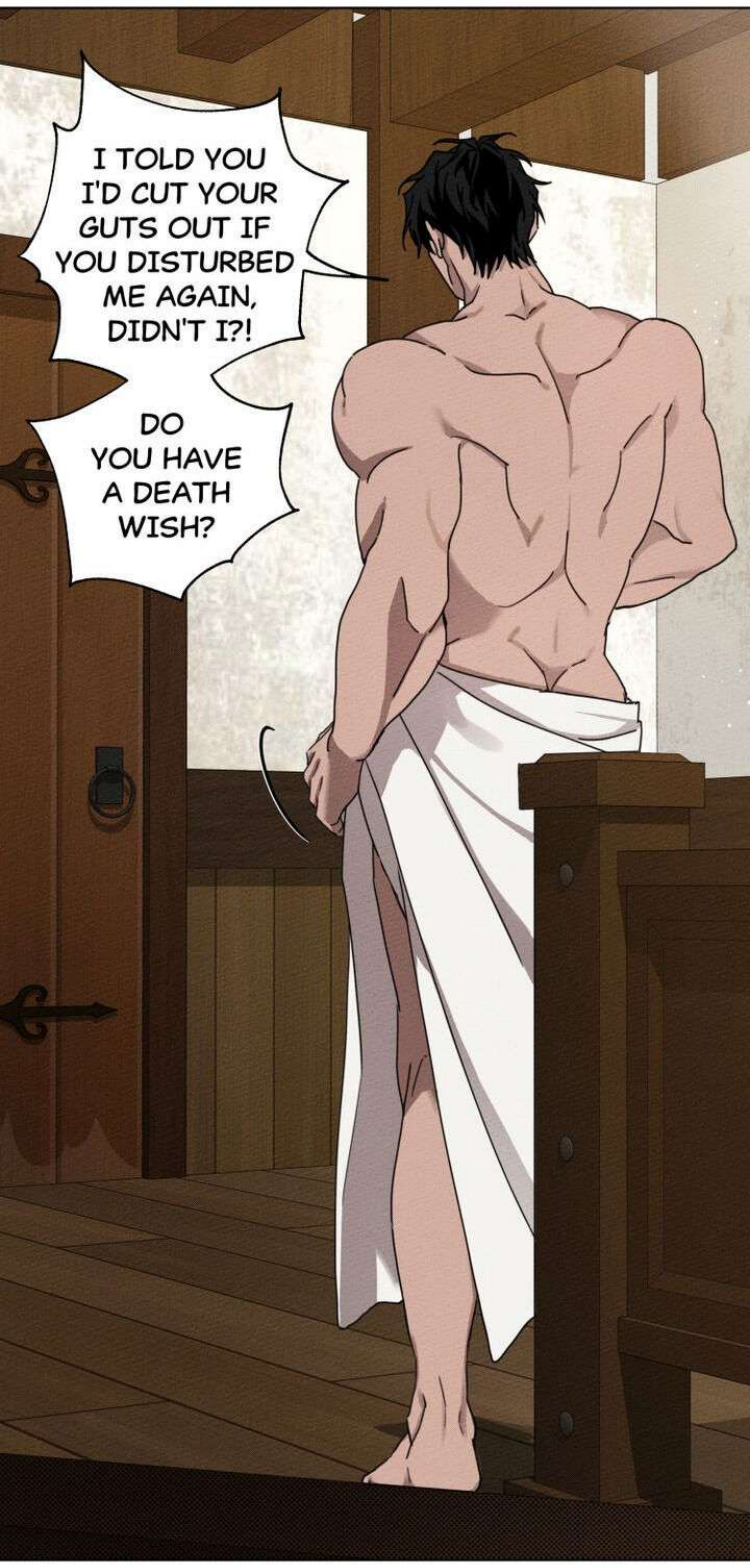

WHAT DID YOU

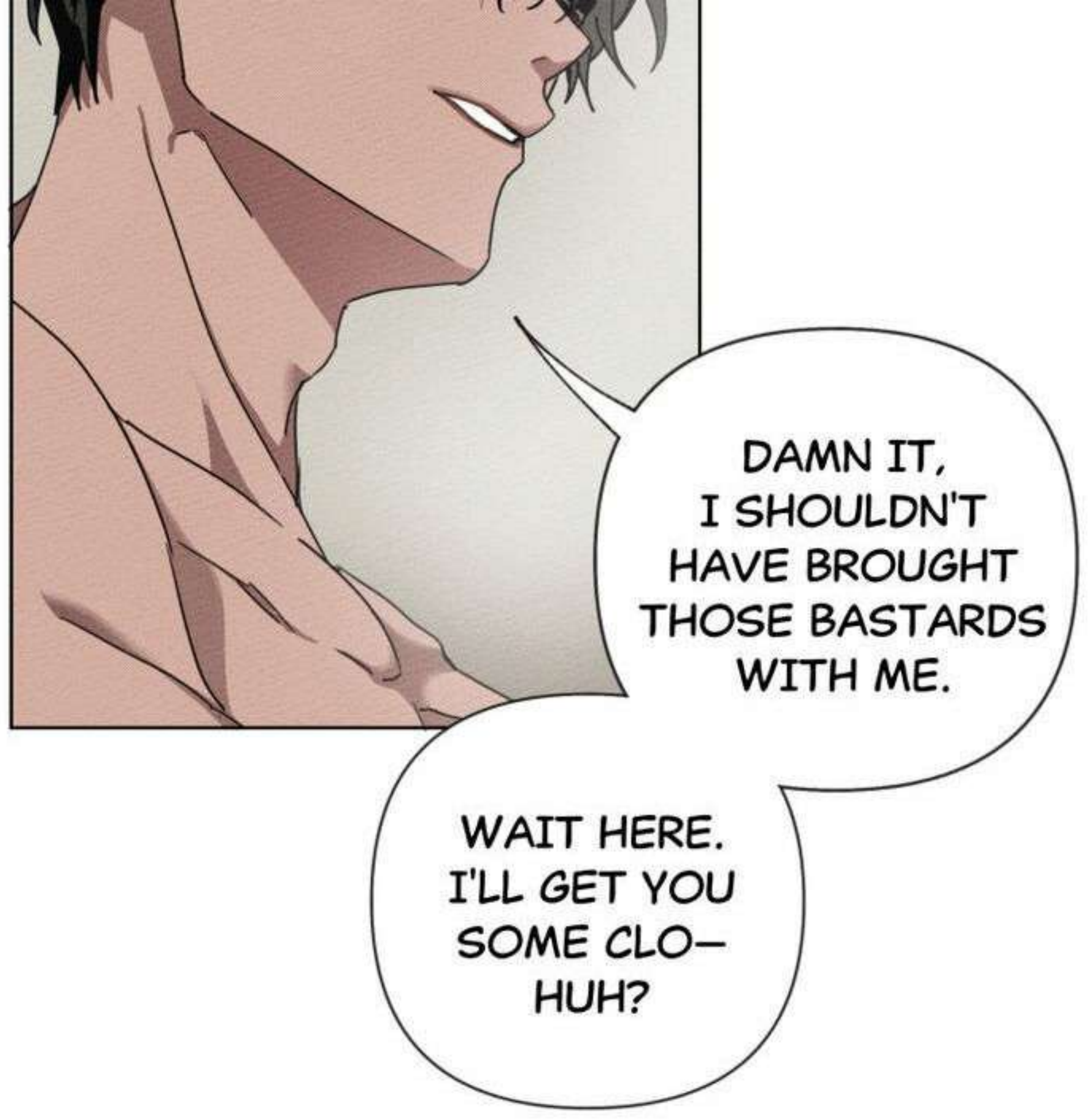
WHAT DID YOU JUST...?

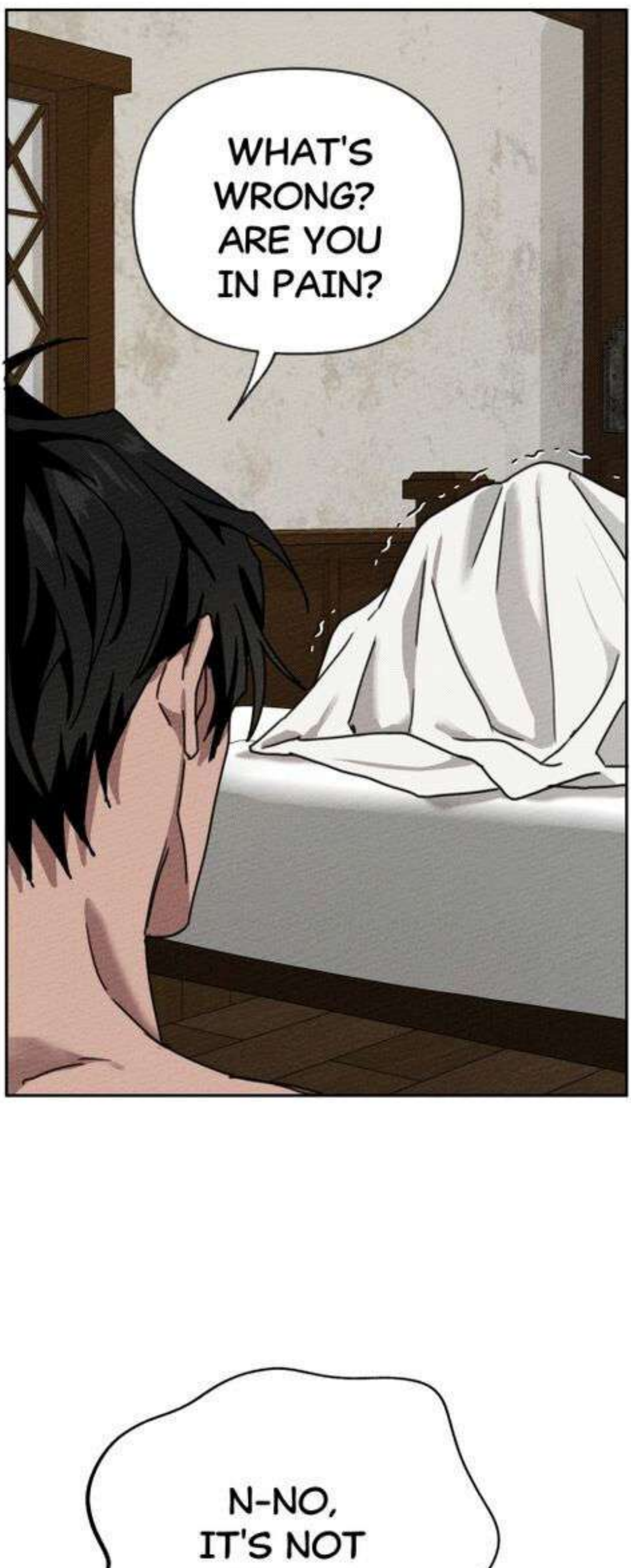

BANG BANG BANG

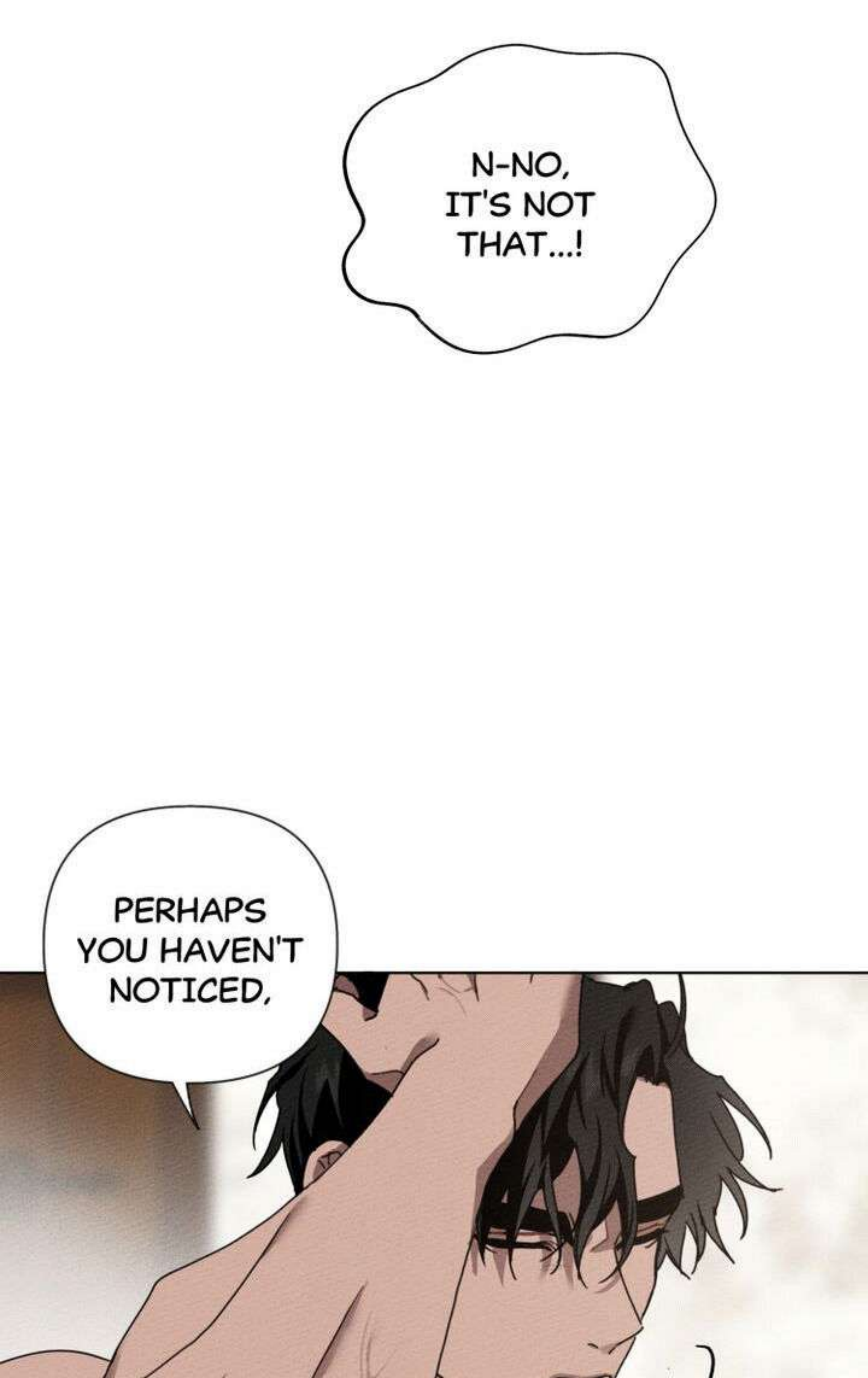
BANG BANG
HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO BE IN THERE, SIR?

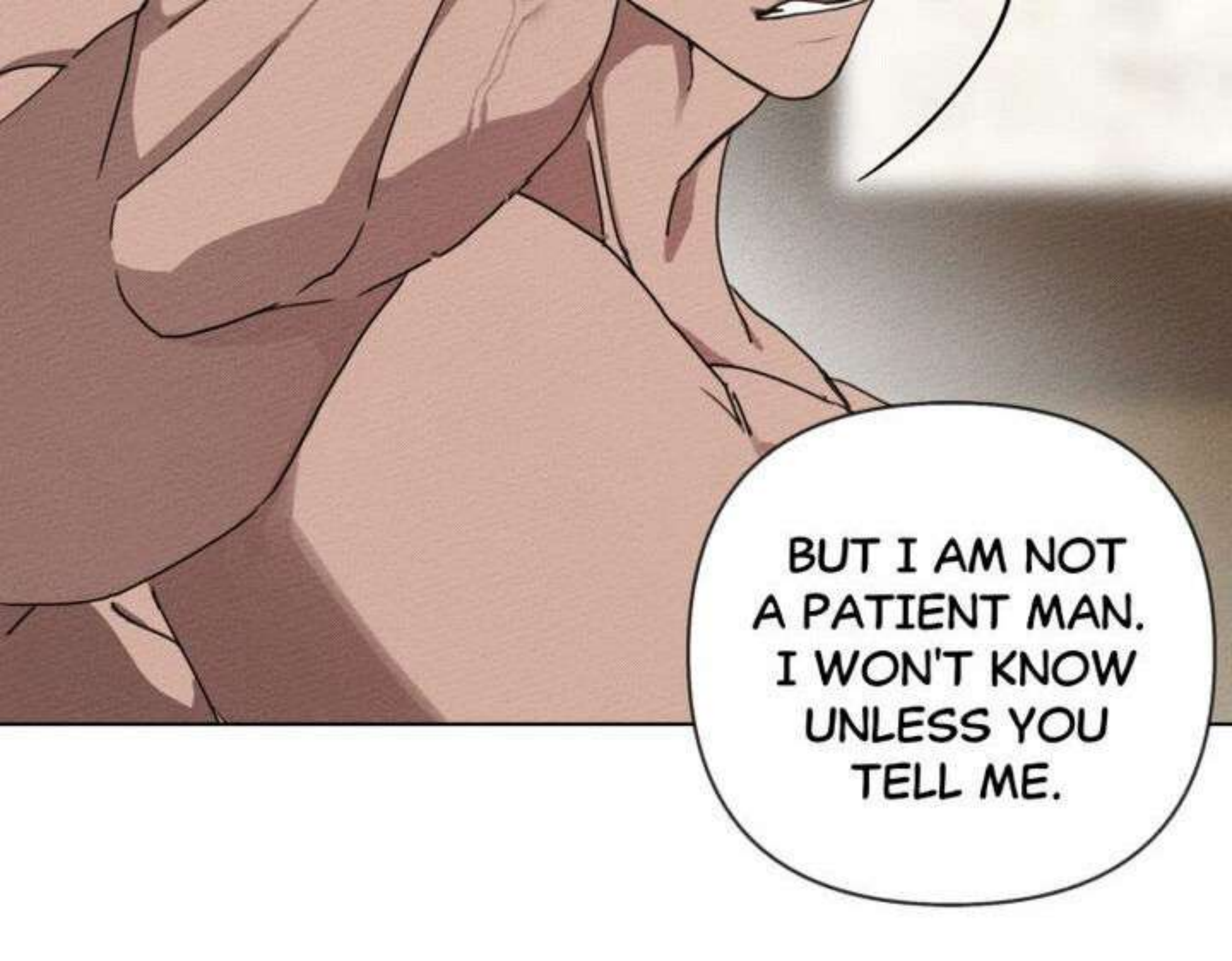

R-RIFTAN, S-SOMEONE'S AT THE DOOR...!
DAMN IT.
IT'S NOON ALREADY! YOU CAN CONTINUE

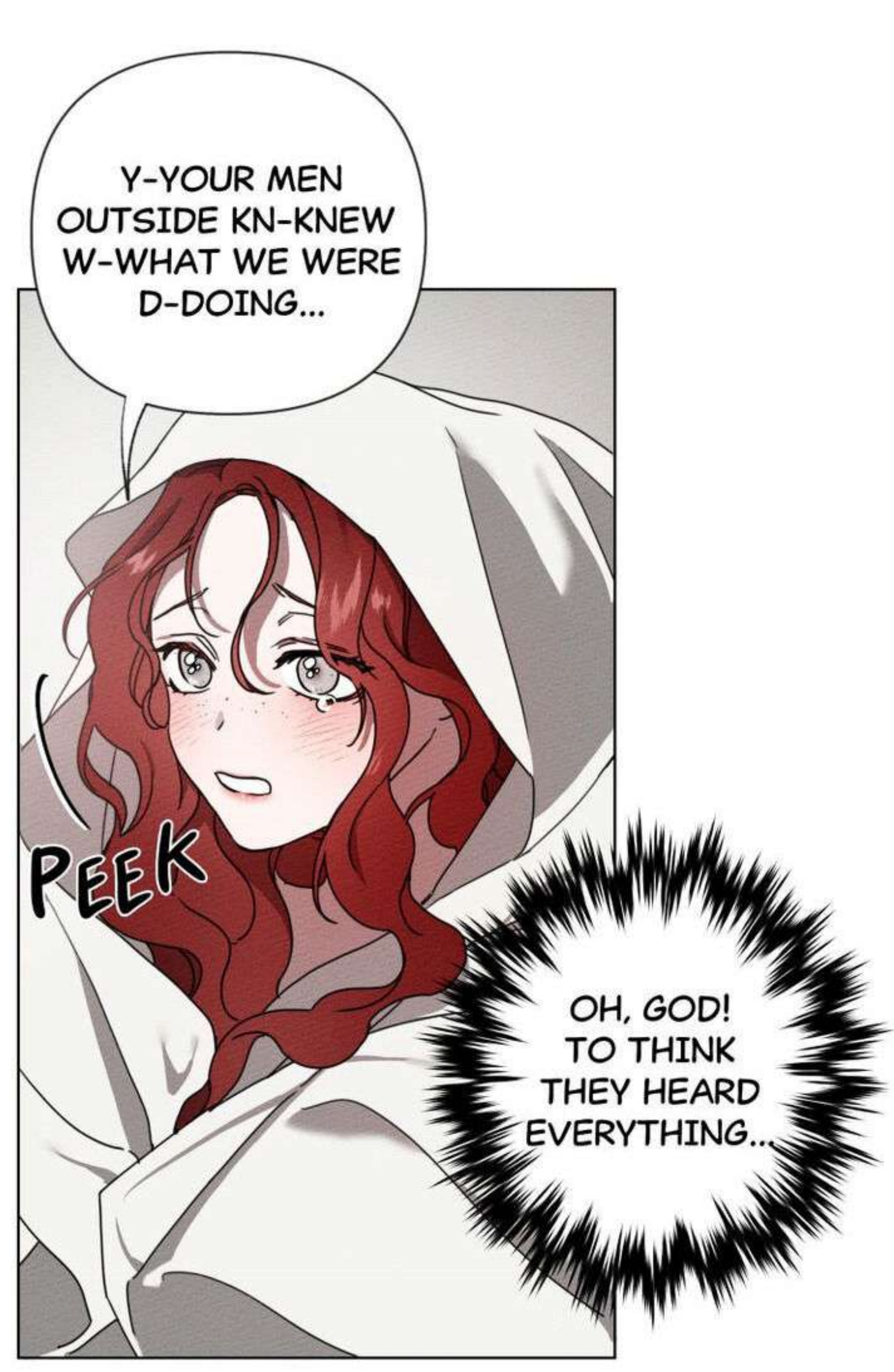

WHEN WE GET HOME!
I TOLD YOU I'D CUT YOUR GUTS OUT IF YOU DISTURBED ME AGAIN, DIDN'T I?!
DO YOU HAVE A DEATH WISH?
BUT SIR... WE HAVE TO HEAD BACK TO THE CAPITAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!
STOP WHINING! IT WON'T KILL US TO DELAY THINGS BY A DAY! JUST GET THE CARRIAGE READY.

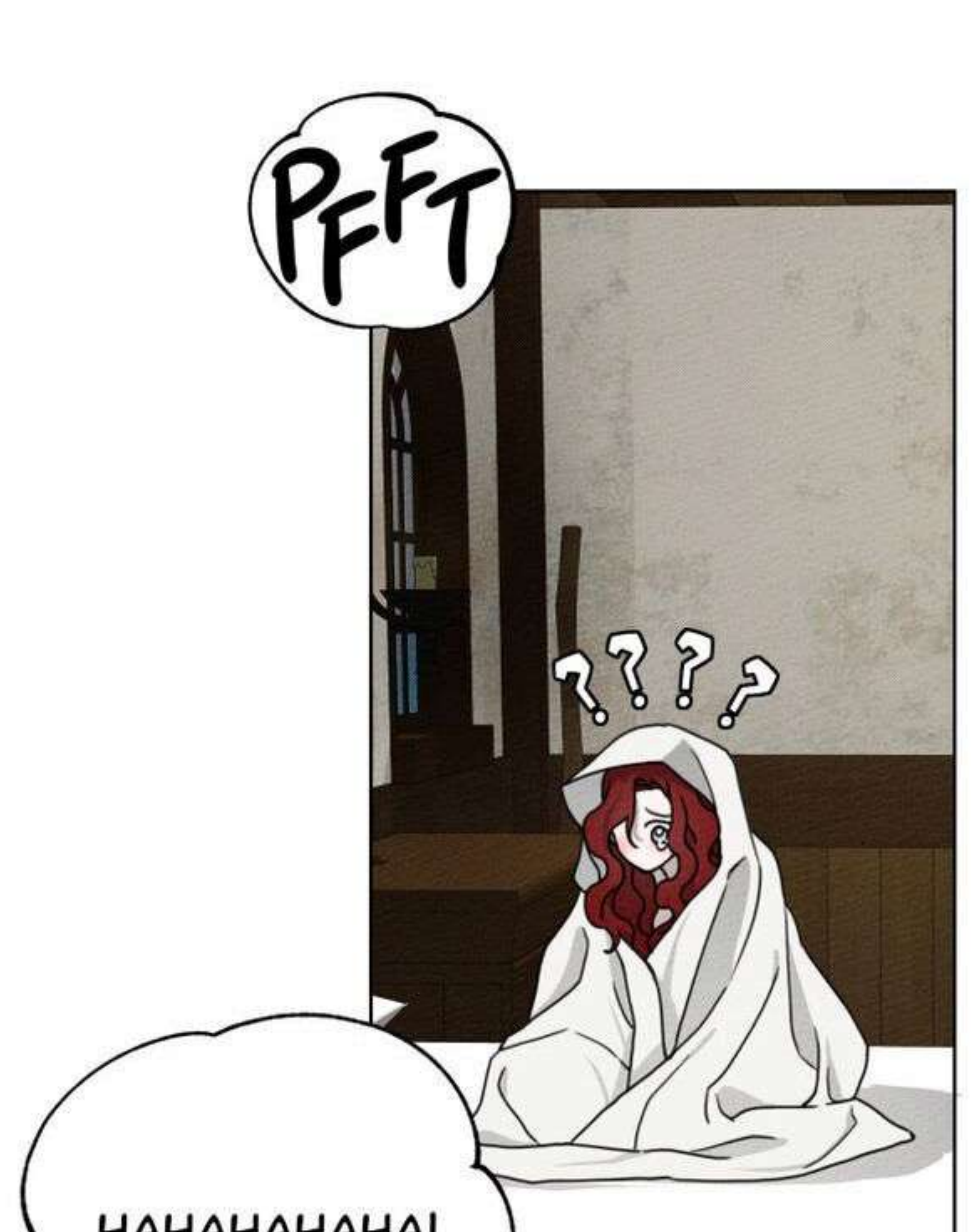

DAMN IT, I SHOULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT THOSE BASTARDS WITH ME.
WAIT HERE. I'LL GET YOU SOME CLO— HUH?

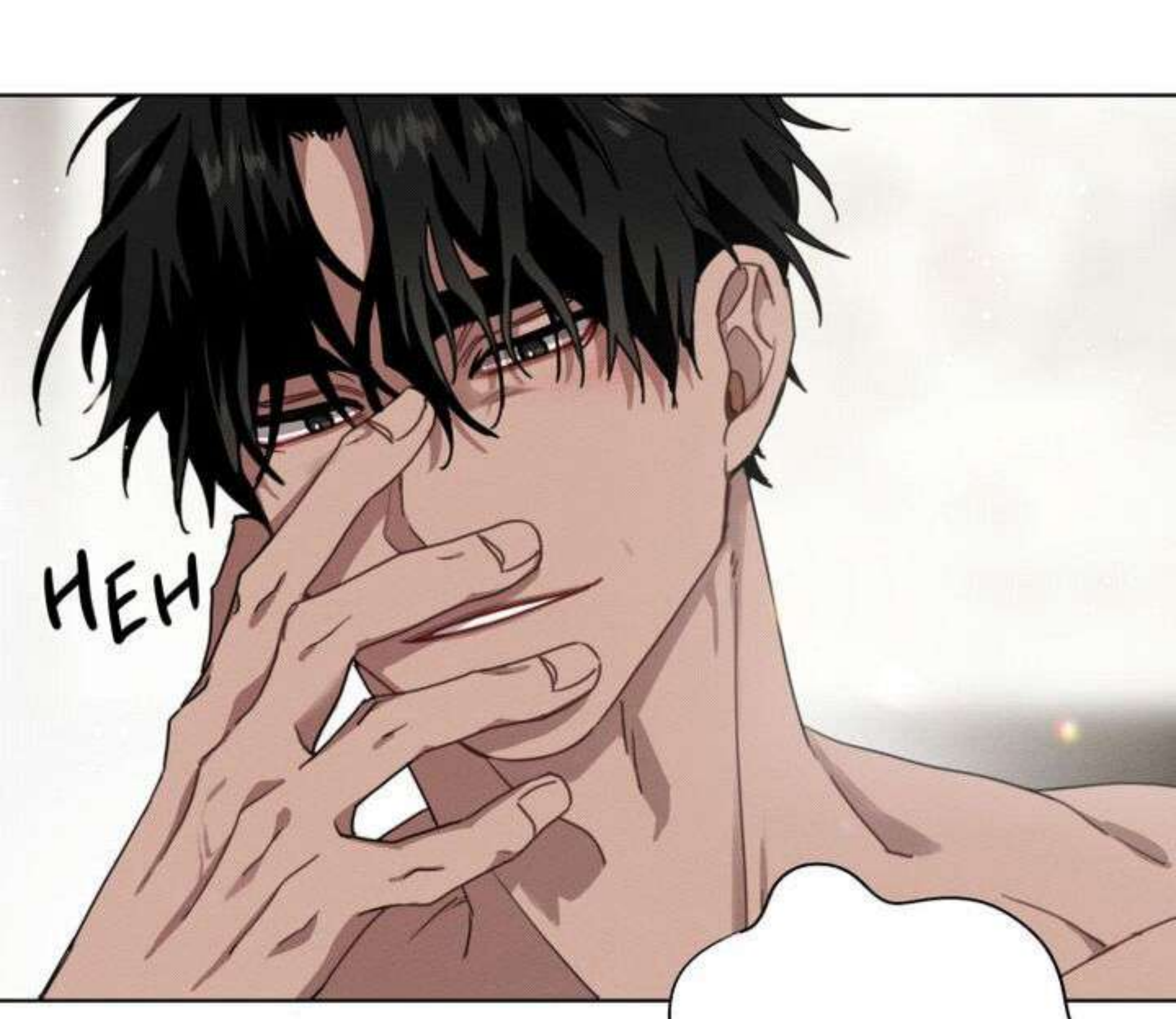

WHAT'S WRONG? ARE YOU IN PAIN?
N-NO, IT'S NOT THAT...!


PERHAPS YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED,


BUT I AM NOT A PATIENT MAN. I WON'T KNOW UNLESS YOU TELL ME.


Y-YOUR MEN OUTSIDE KN-KNEW W-WHAT WE WERE D-DOING...
PEEK
OH, GOD! TO THINK THEY HEARD EVERYTHING...


PFFT
????
HAHAHAHAHA!

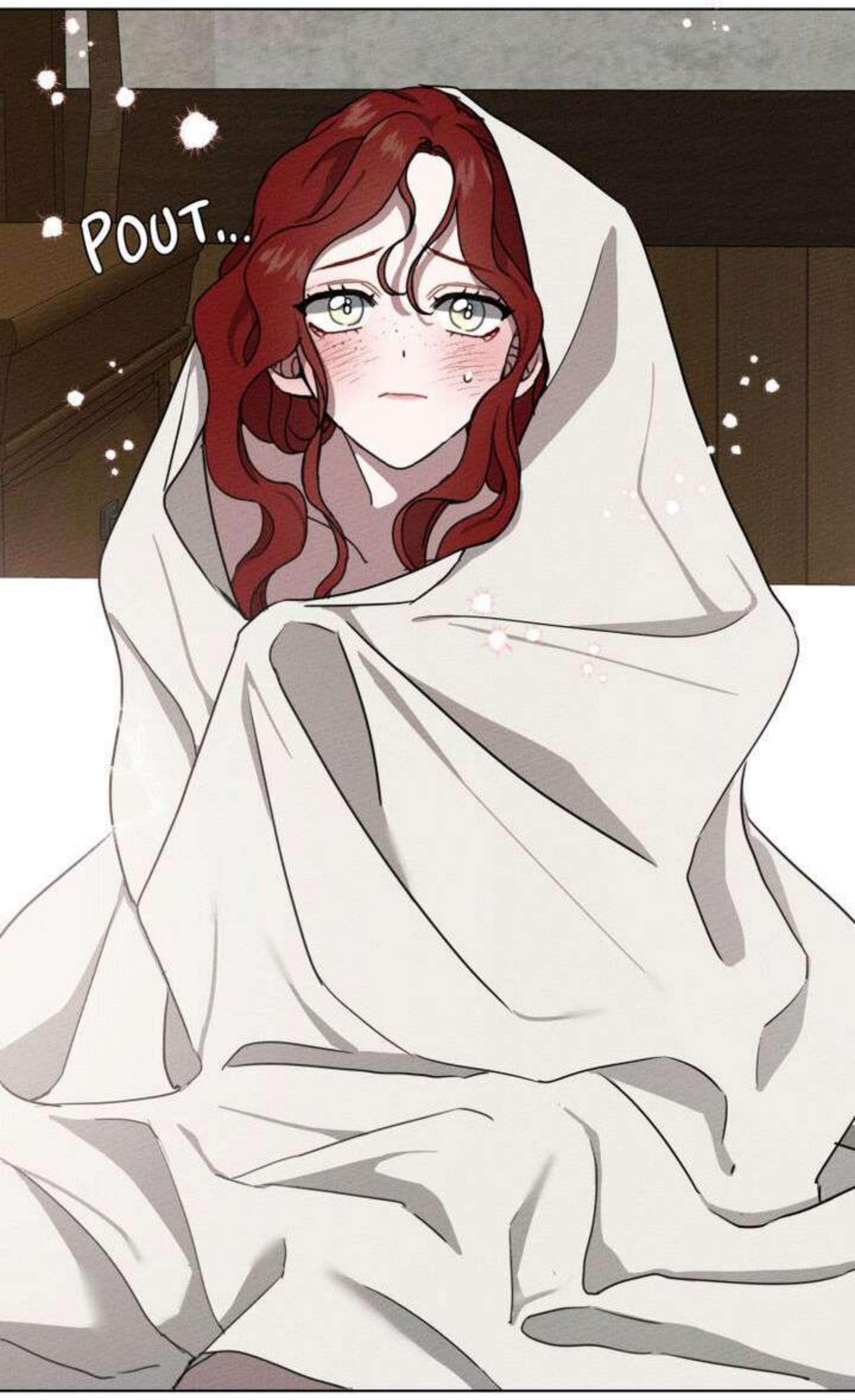

HEH
R-RIFTAN!

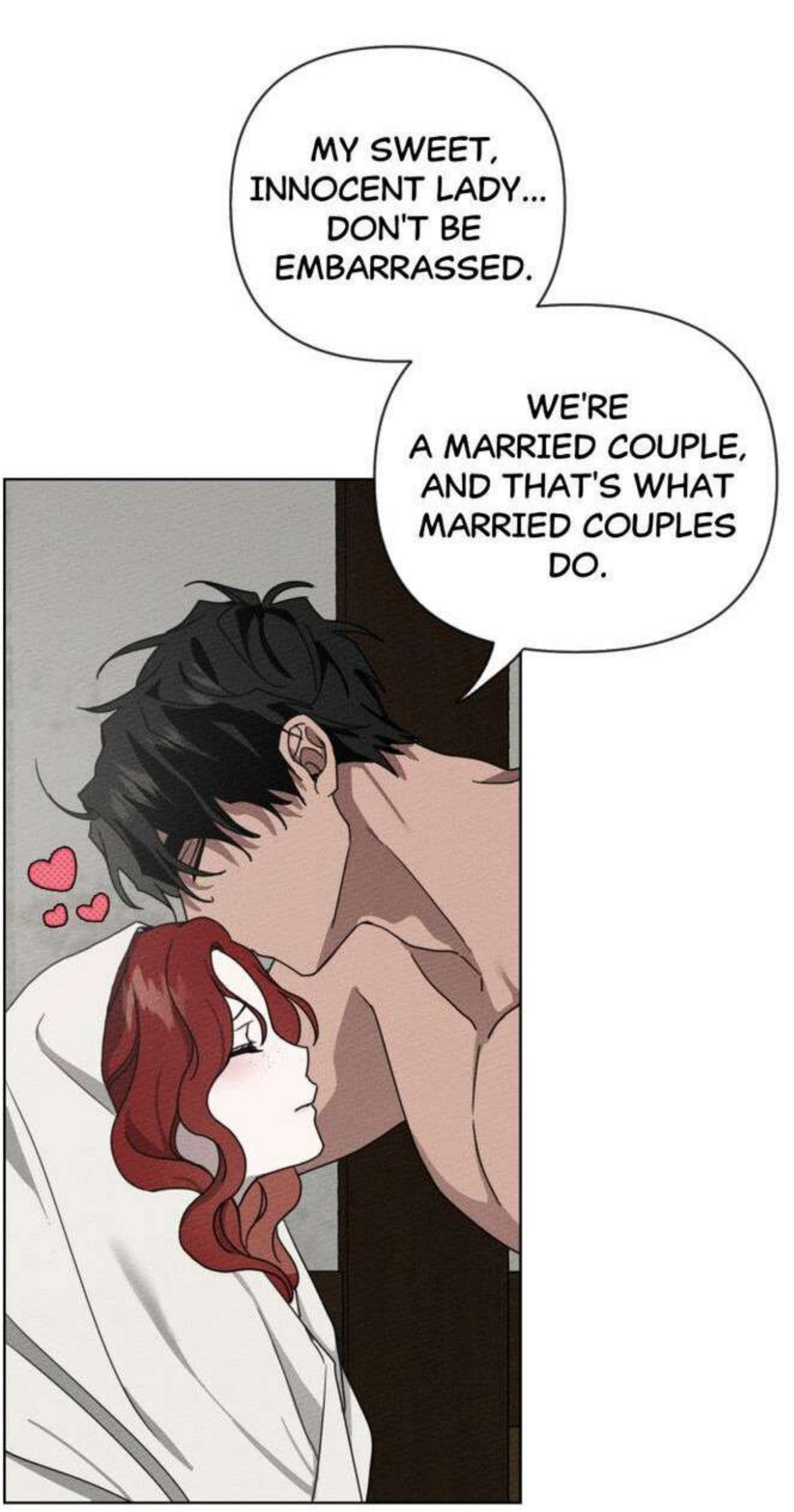
ASSISTANCE INTOL
K_Din
Yemin
PRODUCTION SUPPORT orangetrack

Under the Oak Tree

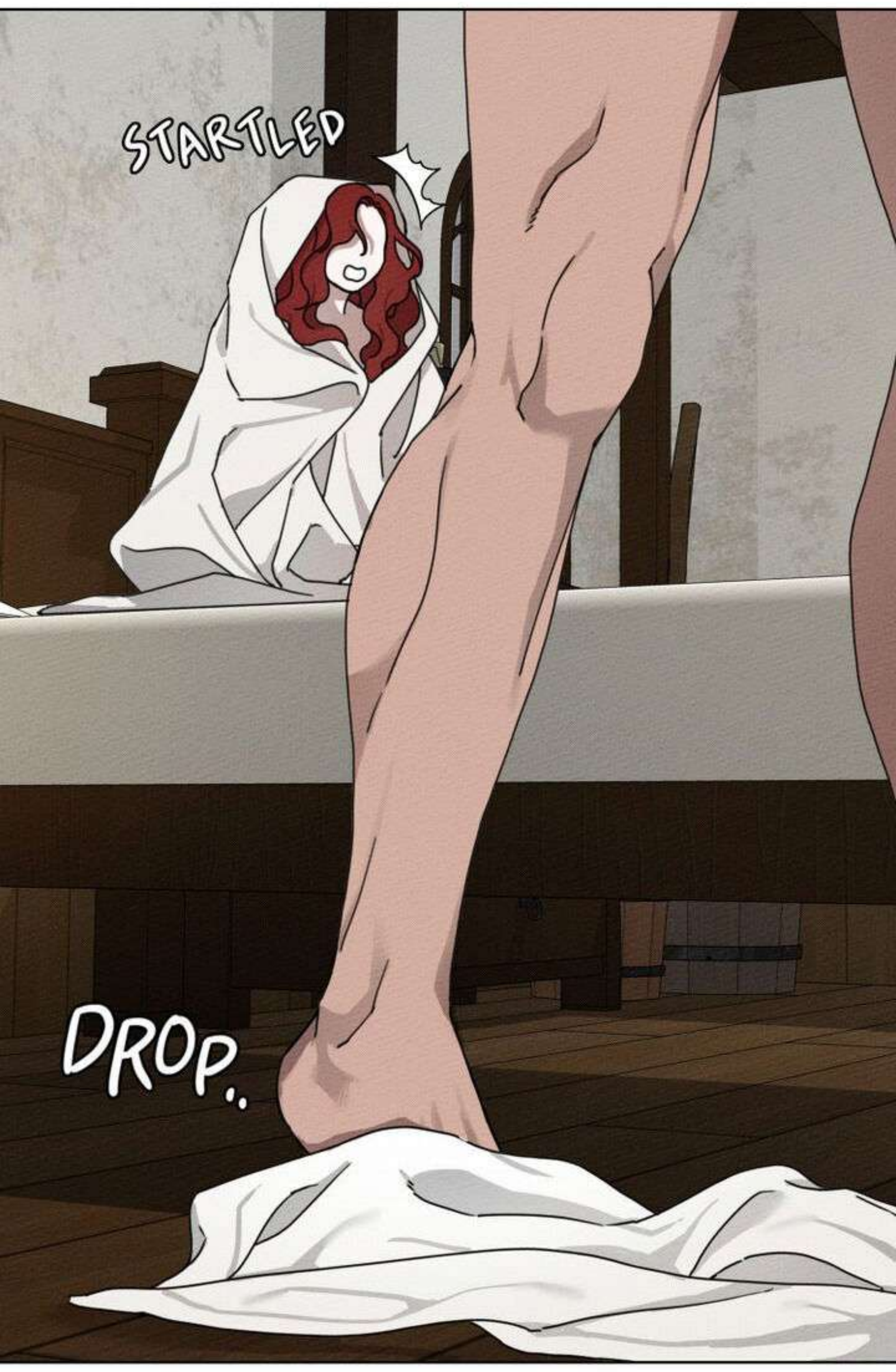
ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

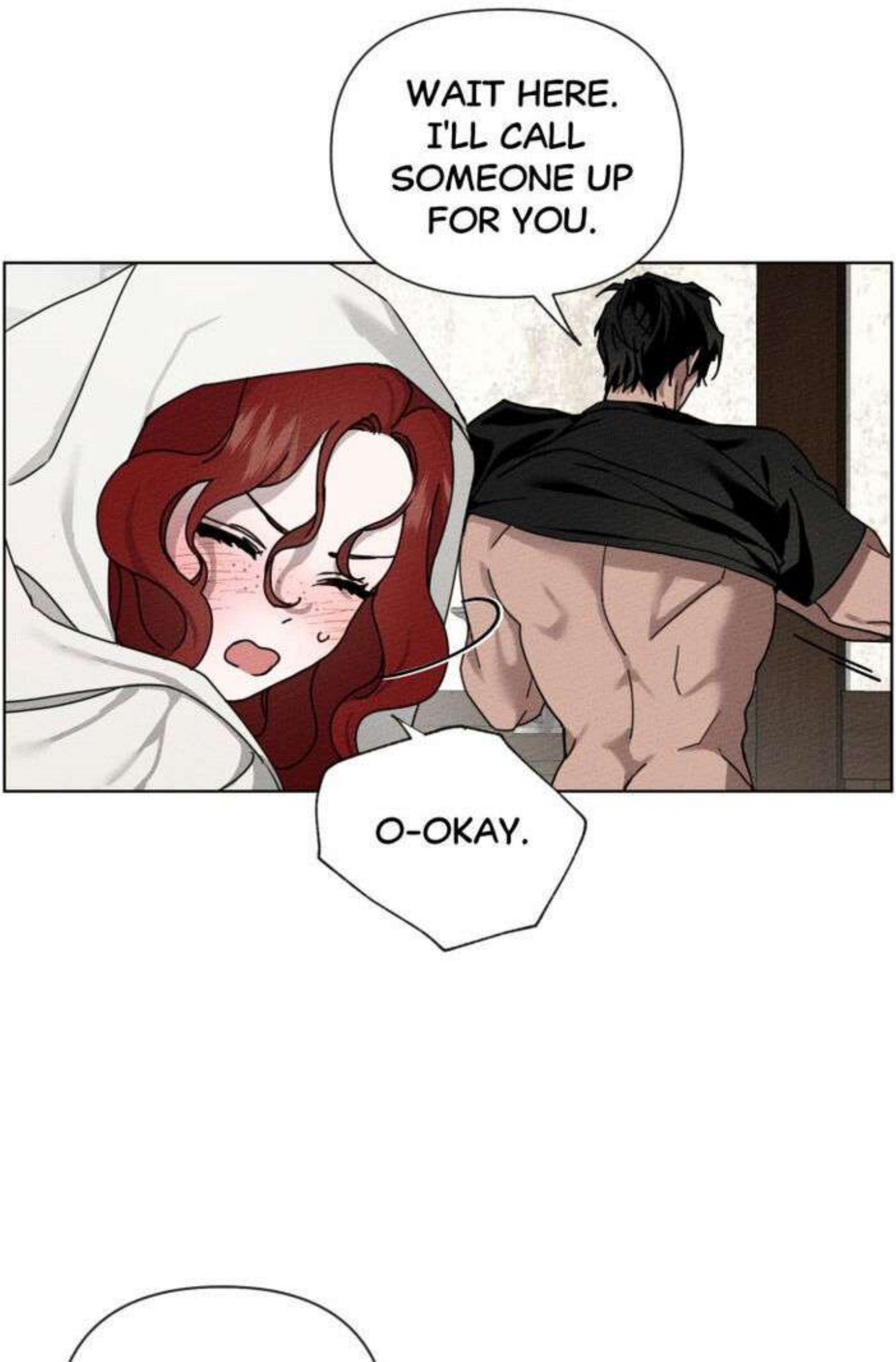
6

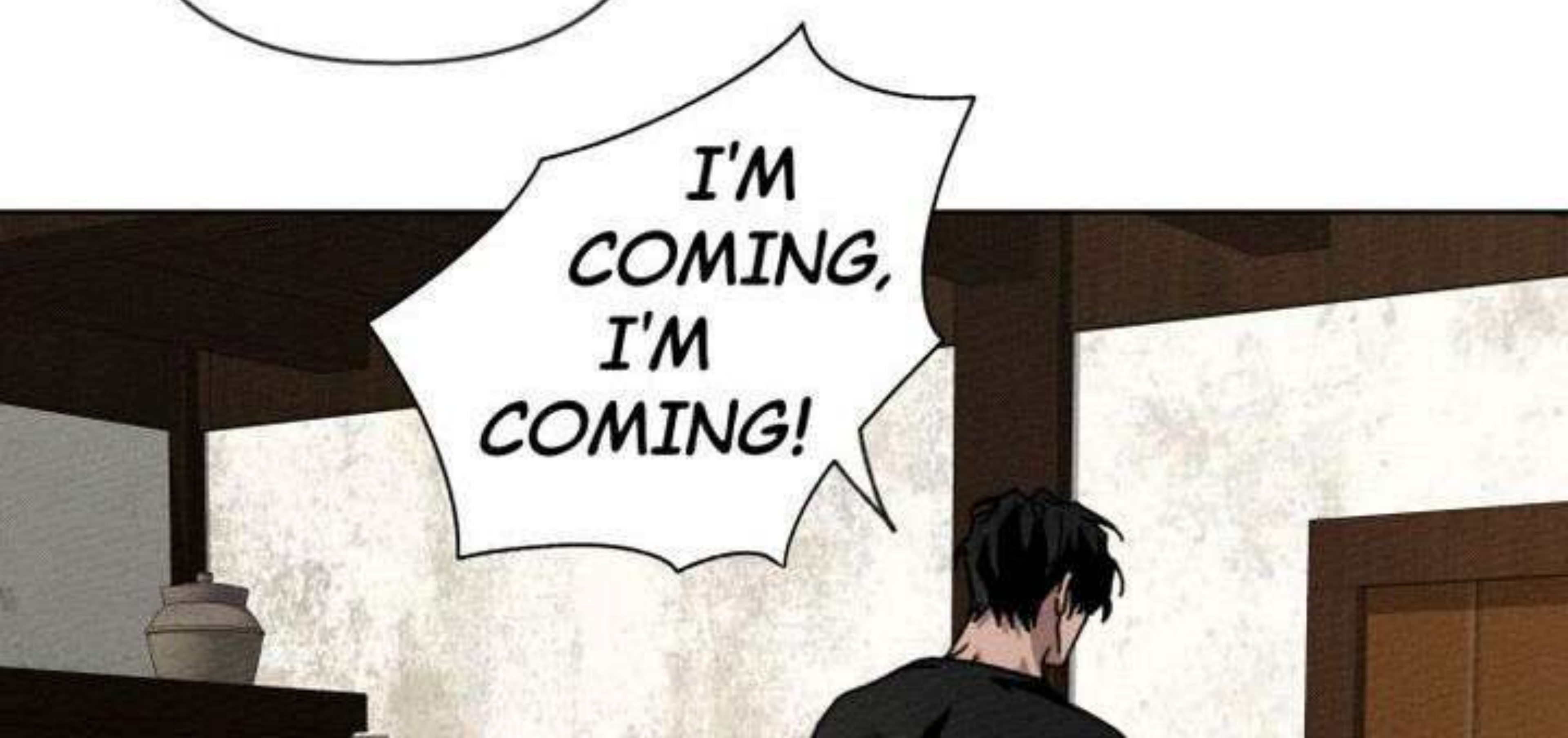

POUT...

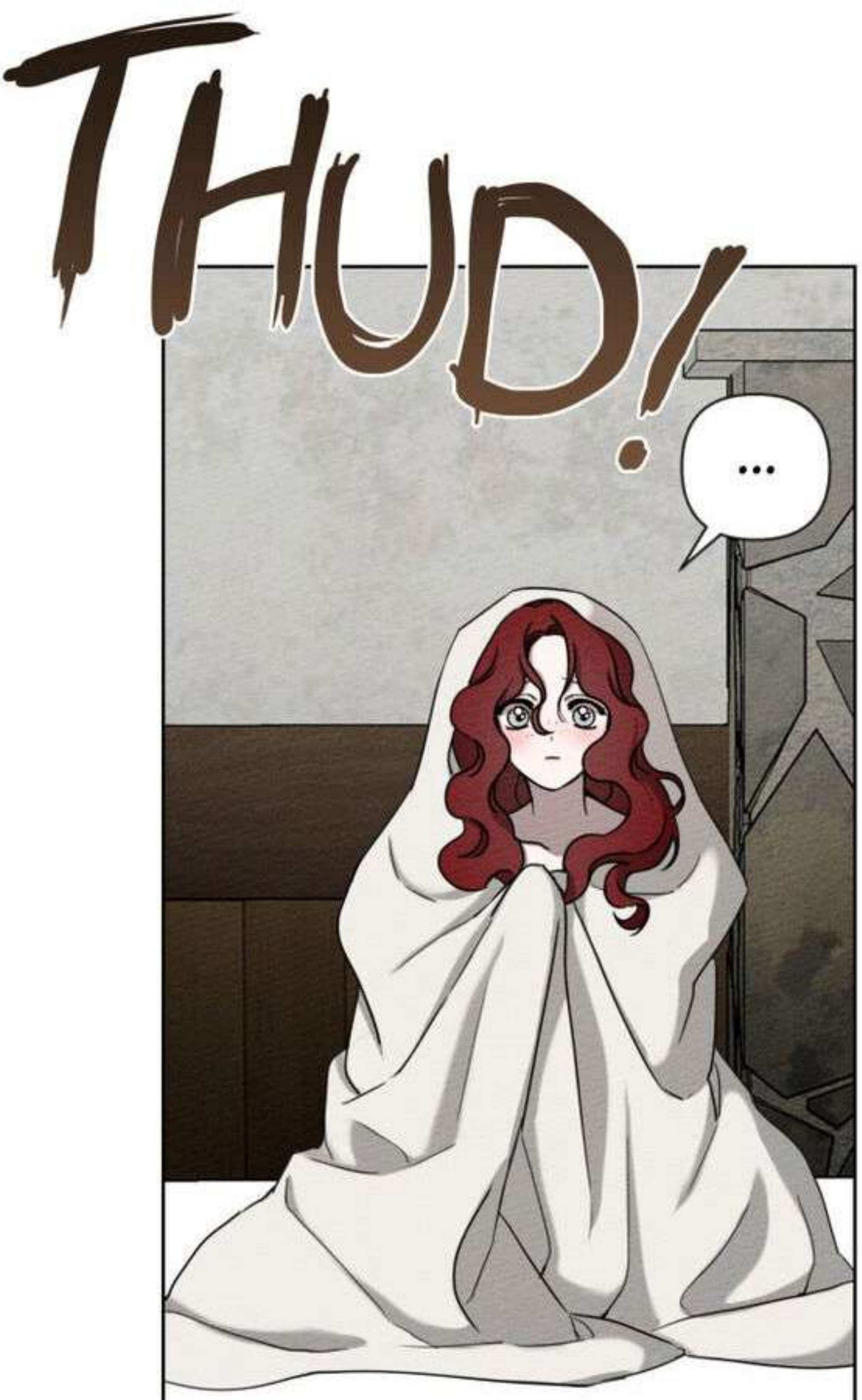

MY SWEET, INNOCENT LADY... DON'T BE EMBARRASSED.
WE'RE A MARRIED COUPLE, AND THAT'S WHAT MARRIED COUPLES DO.

A C-COUPLE...
THAT'S RIGHT. IT'S ONLY NATURAL.
BANG BANG!
DAMN IT, I REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT THOSE BASTARDS WITH ME.
SLID

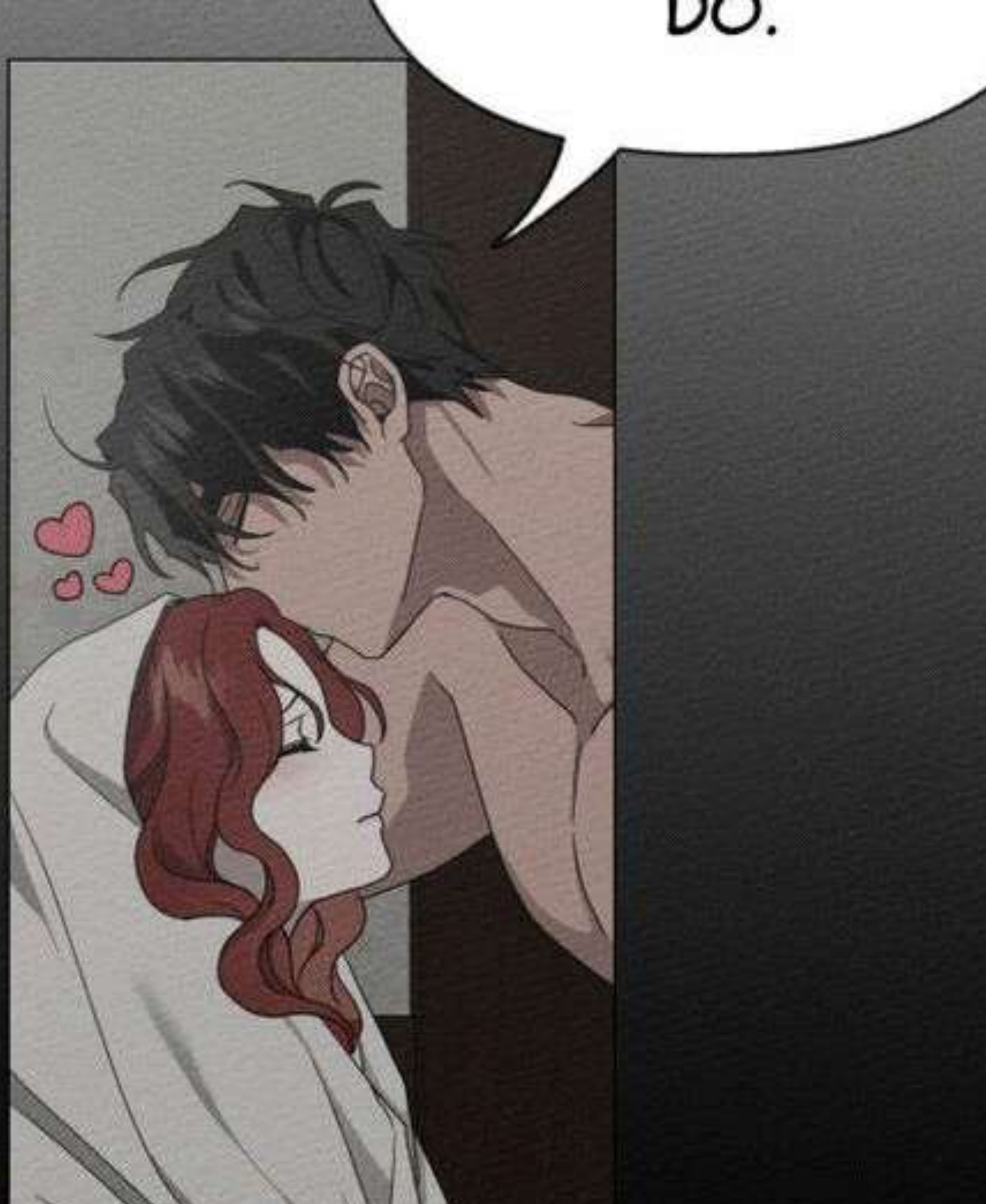

STARTLED
DROP..

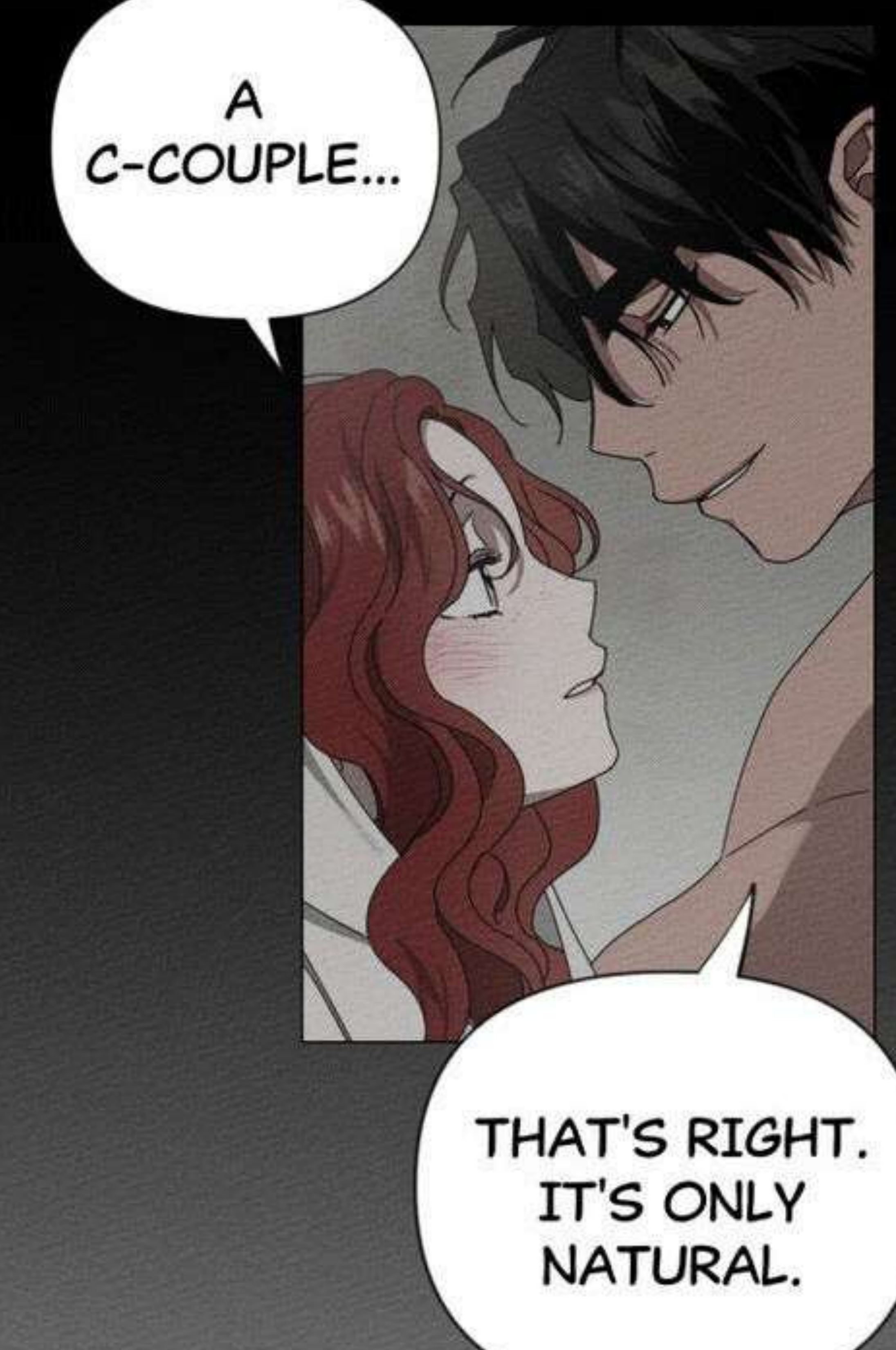

WAIT HERE. I'LL CALL SOMEONE UP FOR YOU.
O-OKAY.

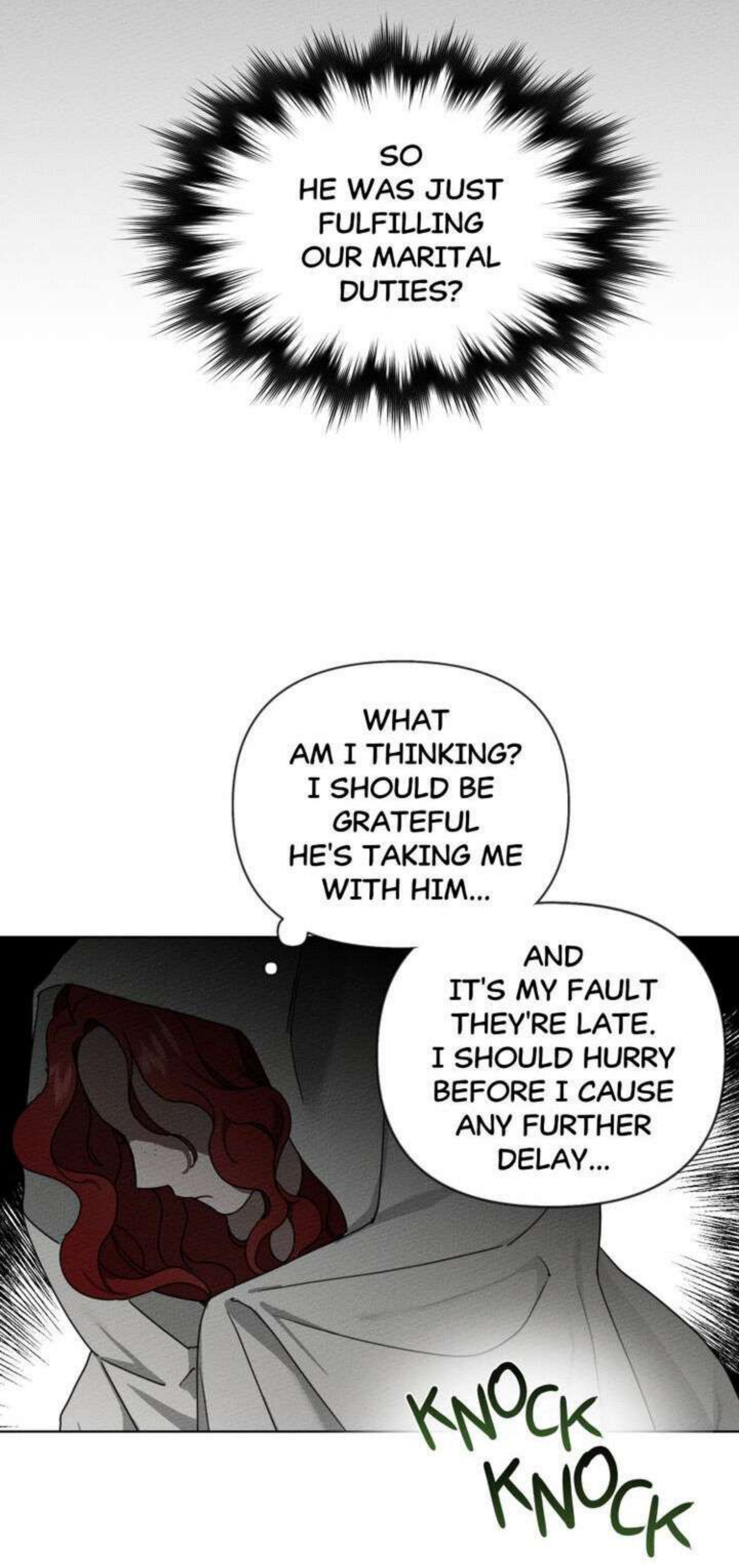

SIR! WHEN ARE YOU COMING OUT?! SIR!
I'M COMING, I'M COMING!

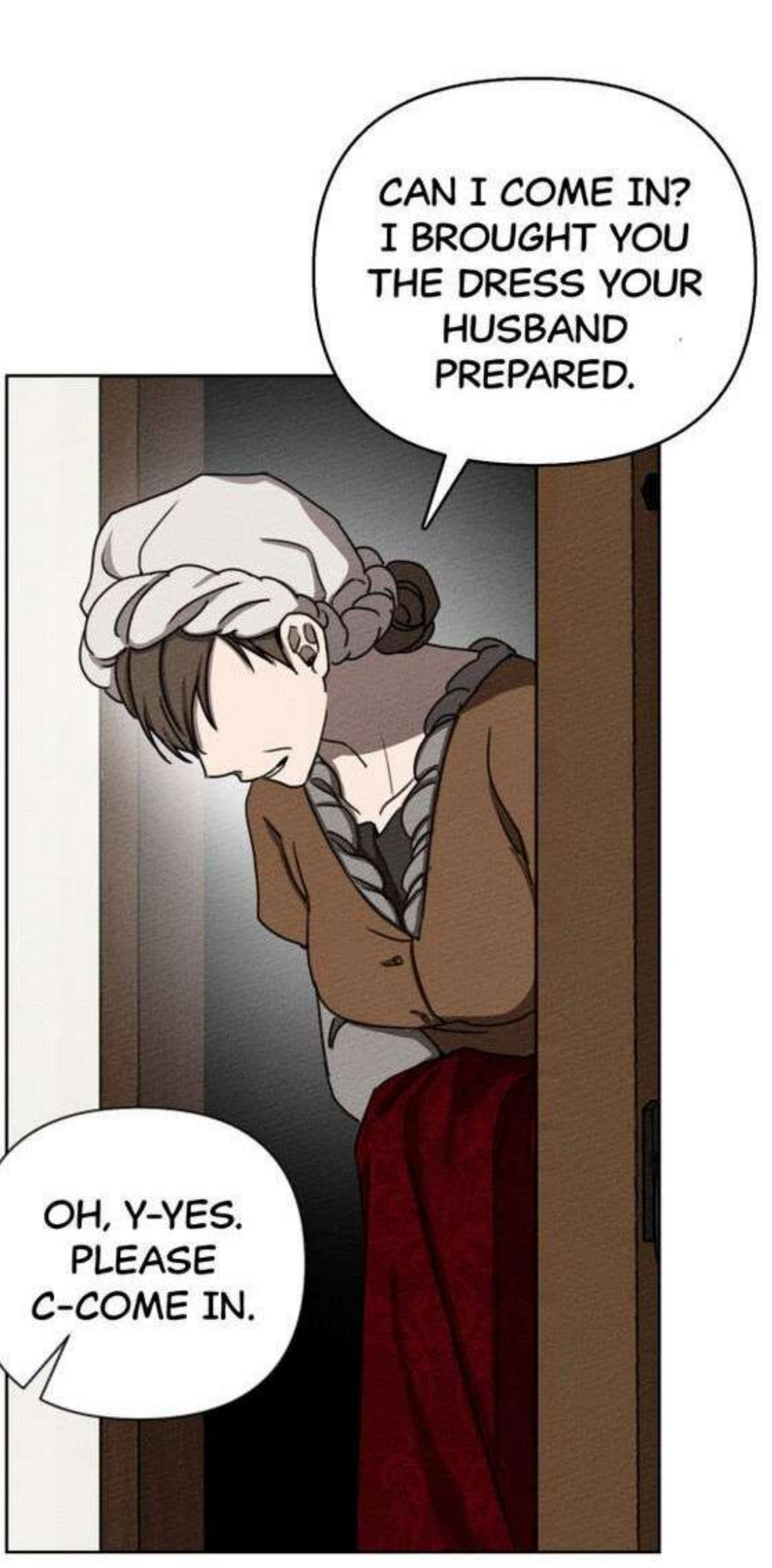

THUD!
...

MY SWEET, INNOCENT LADY... DON'T BE EMBARRASSED.
WE'RE A MARRIED COUPLE, AND THAT'S WHAT MARRIED COUPLES

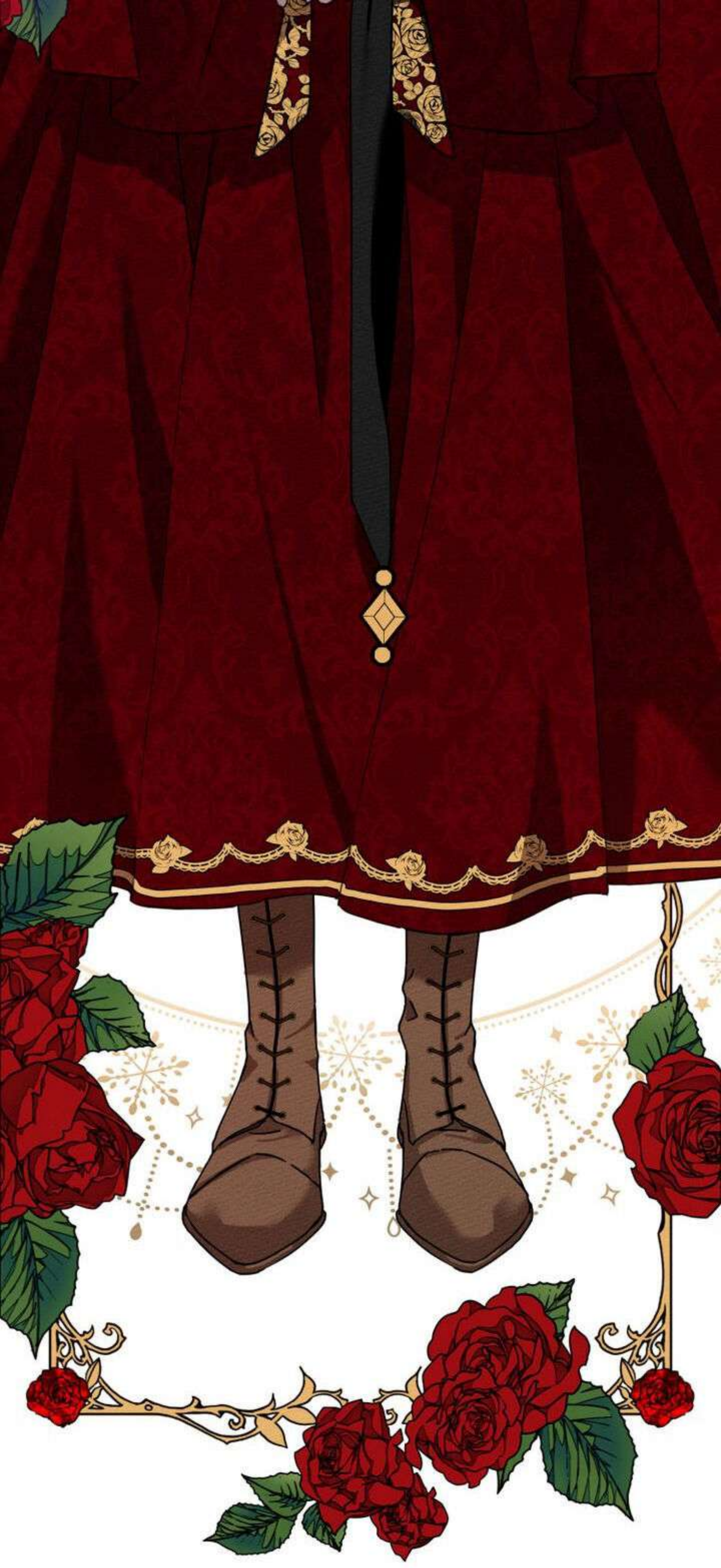

DO.


A C-COUPLE...
THAT'S RIGHT. IT'S ONLY NATURAL.

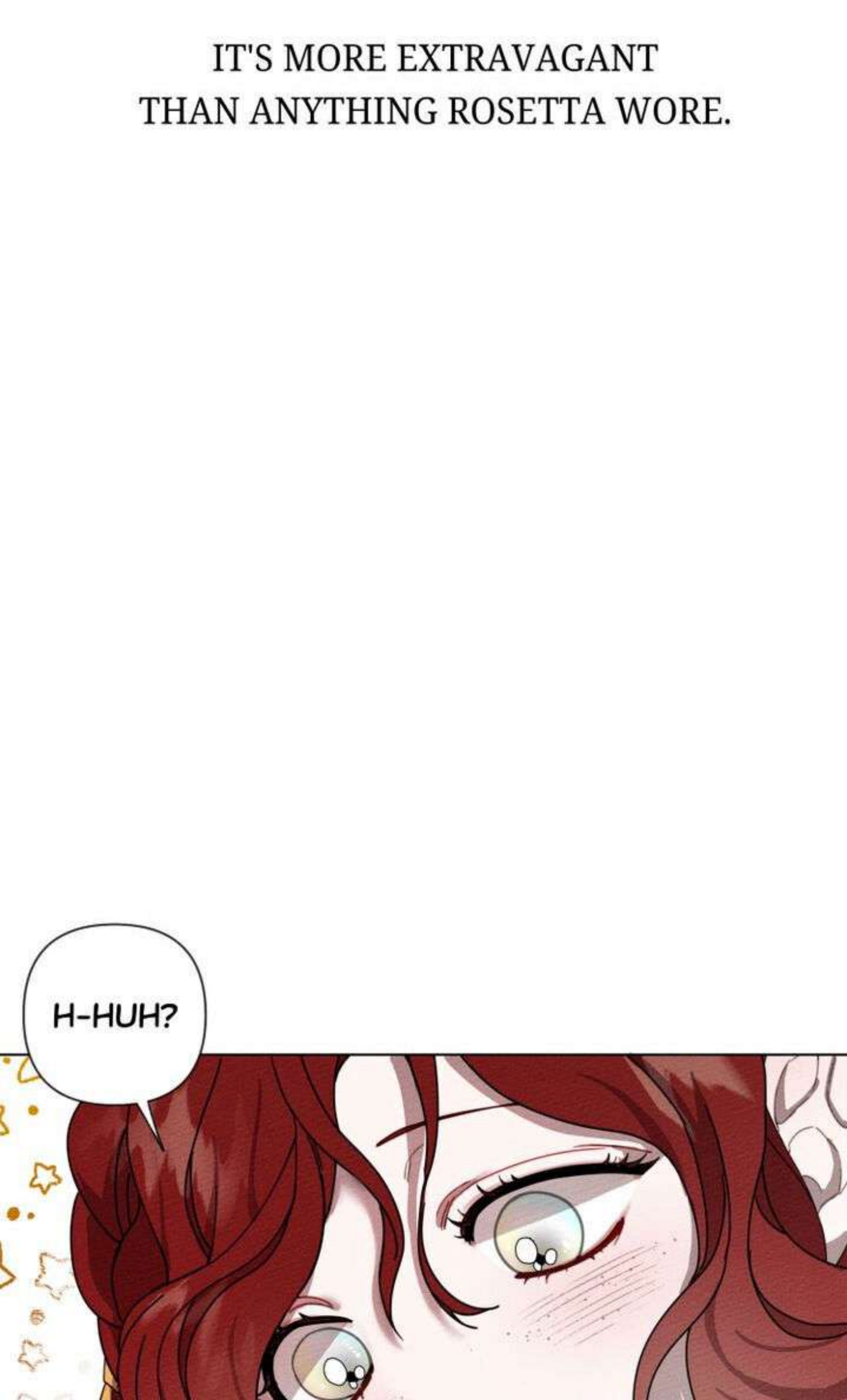

SO HE WAS JUST FULFILLING OUR MARITAL DUTIES?
WHAT AM I THINKING? I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL HE'S TAKING ME WITH HIM...
AND IT'S MY FAULT THEY'RE LATE. I SHOULD HURRY BEFORE I CAUSE ANY FURTHER DELAY...
KNOCK KNOCK

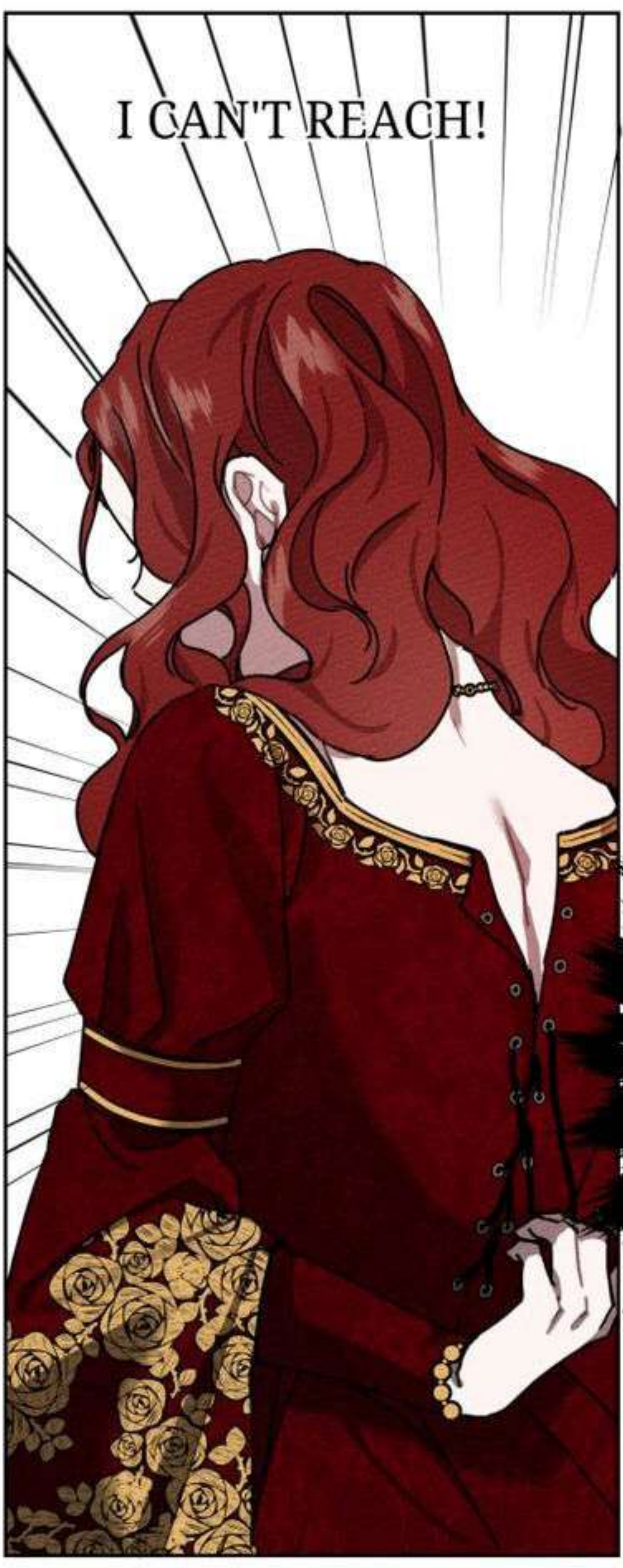

CAN I COME IN? I BROUGHT YOU THE DRESS YOUR HUSBAND PREPARED.
OH, Y-YES. PLEASE C-COME IN.

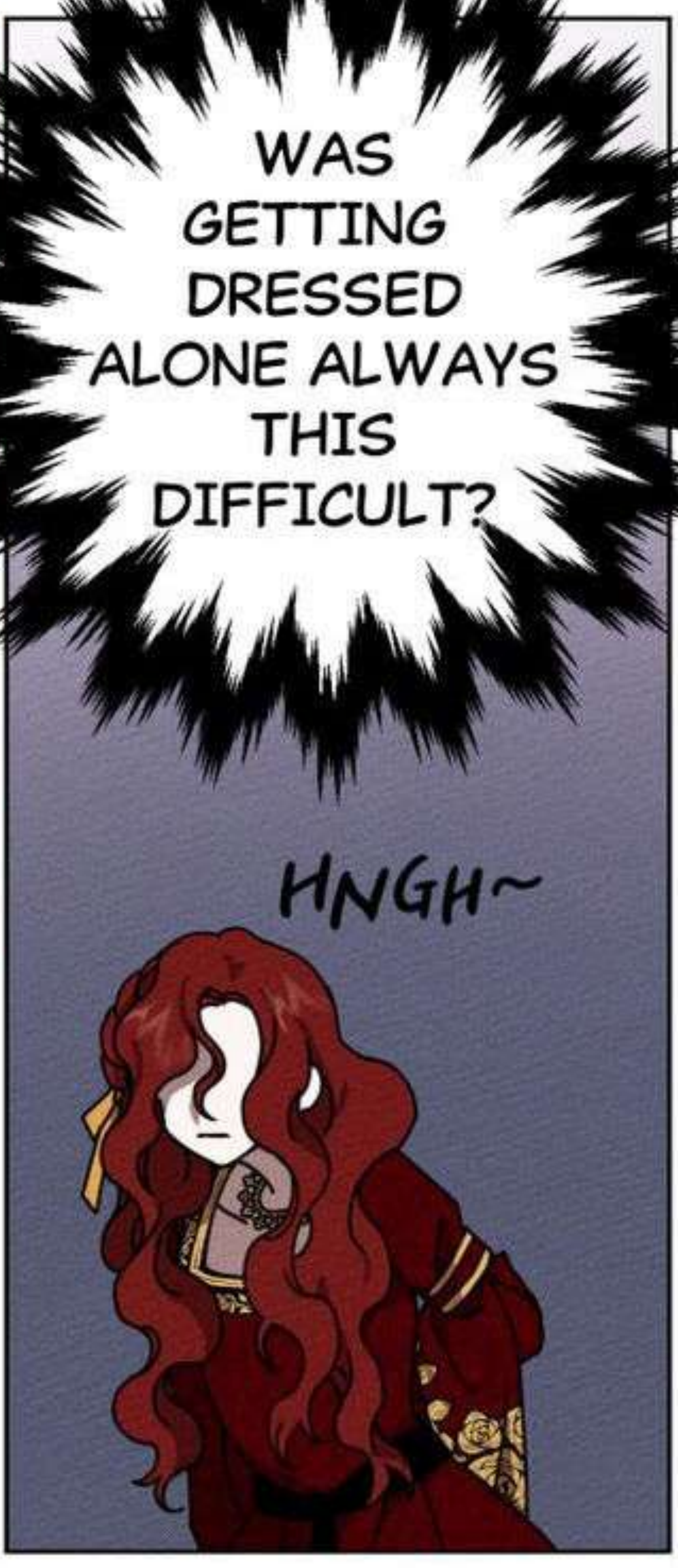
IT'S PRETTY.

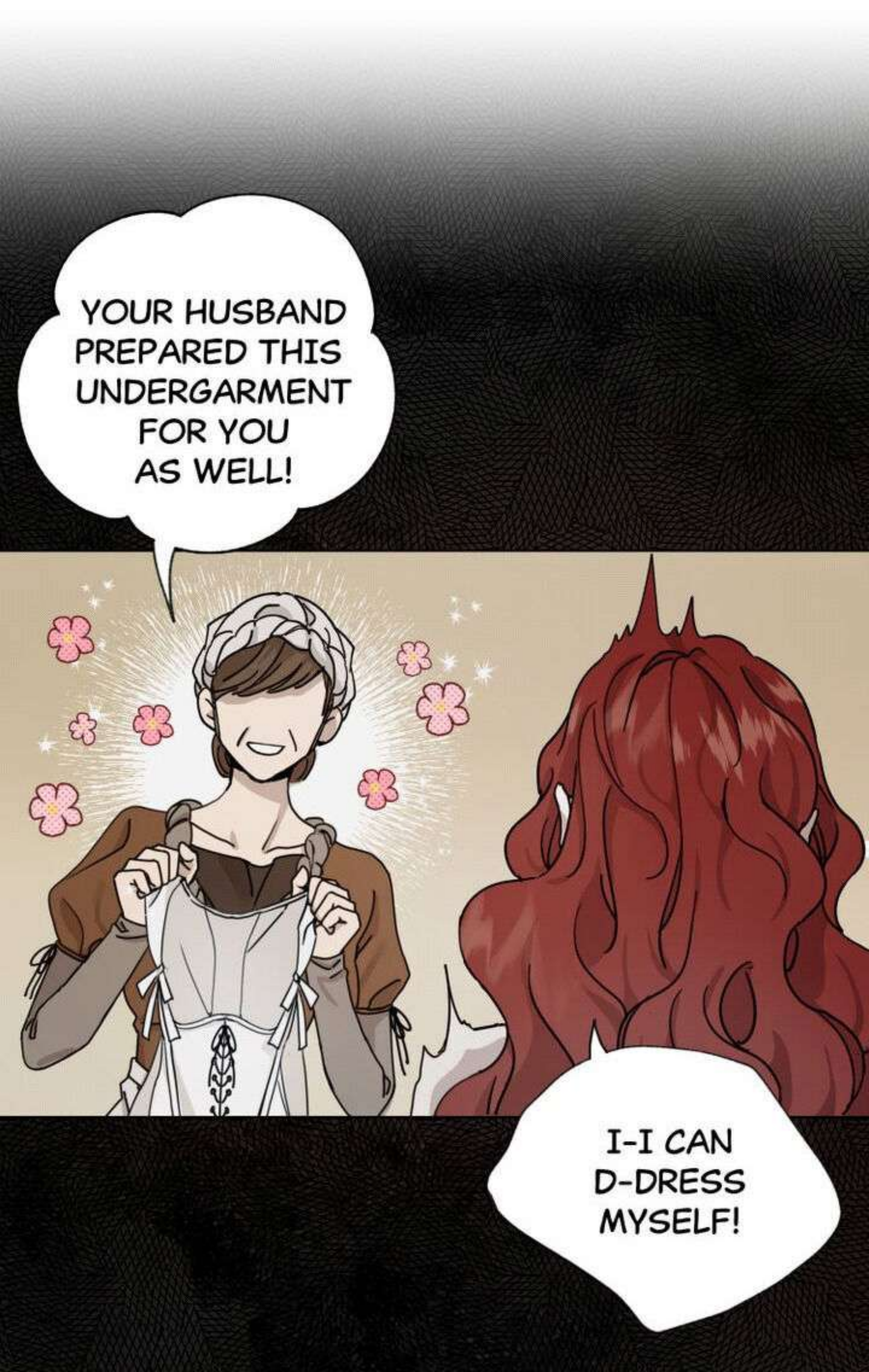


IT'S MORE EXTRAVAGANT
THAN ANYTHING ROSETTA WORE.

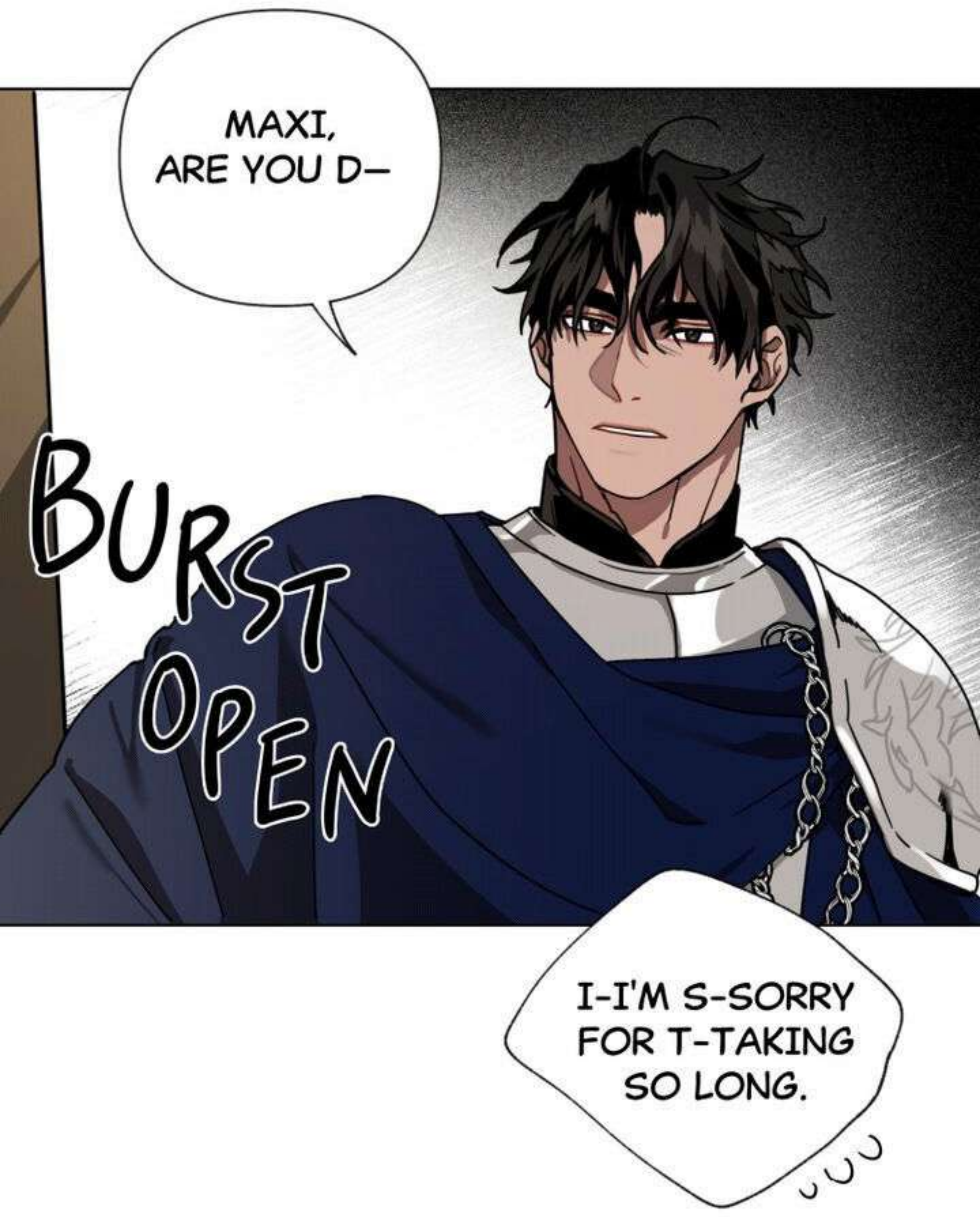


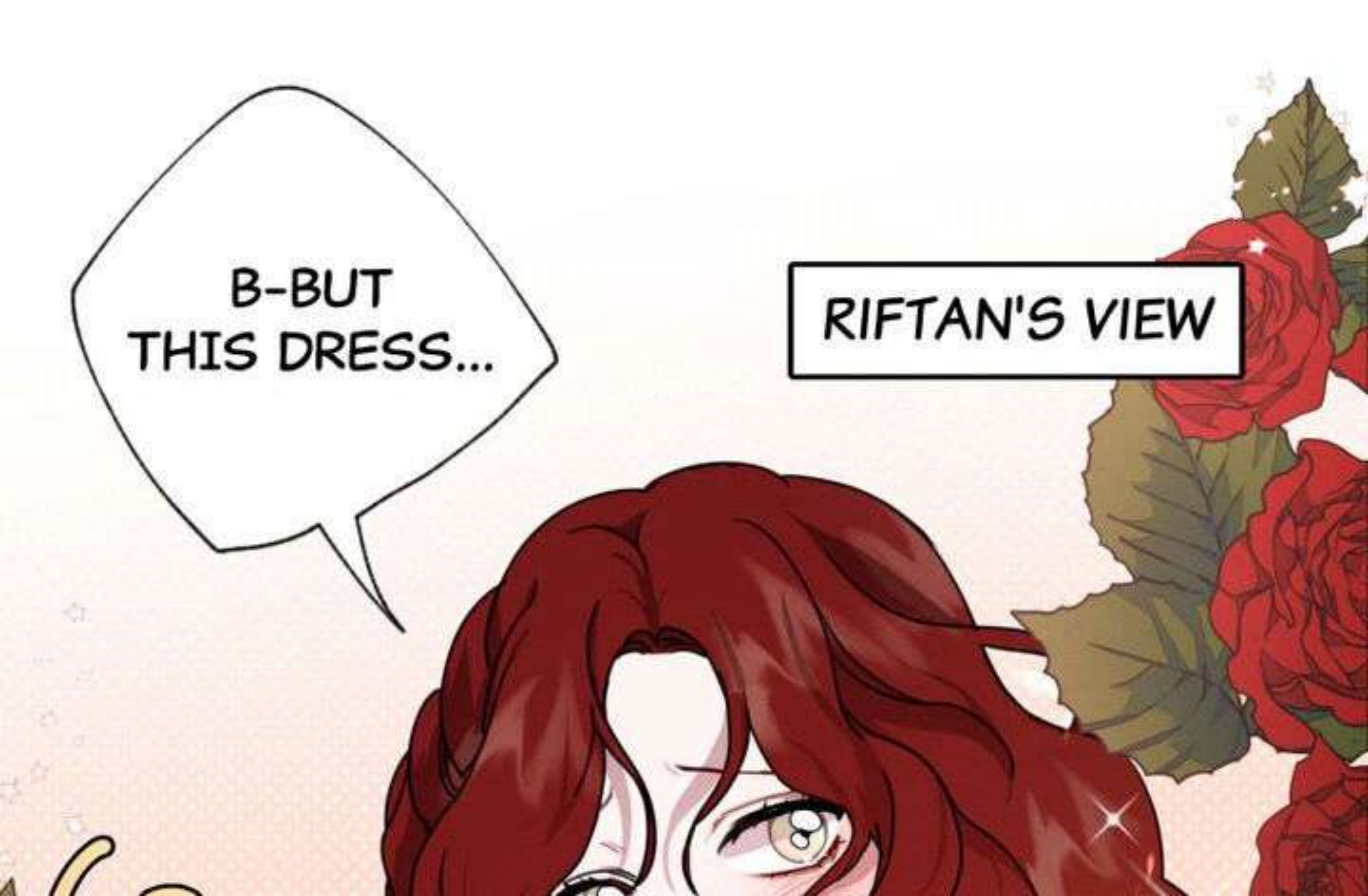

I CAN'T REACH!

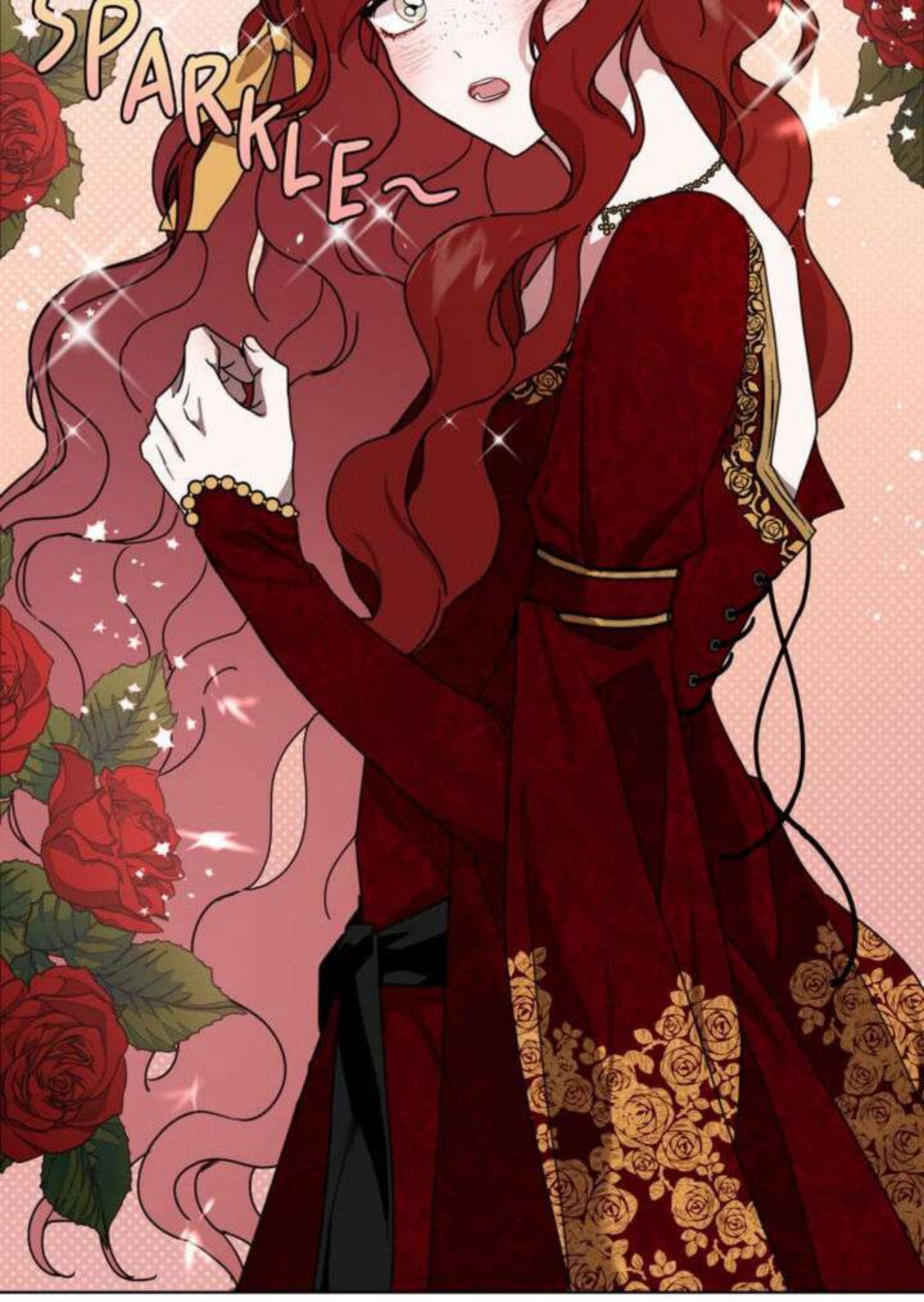

WAS GETTING DRESSED ALONE ALWAYS THIS DIFFICULT?
HNGH~

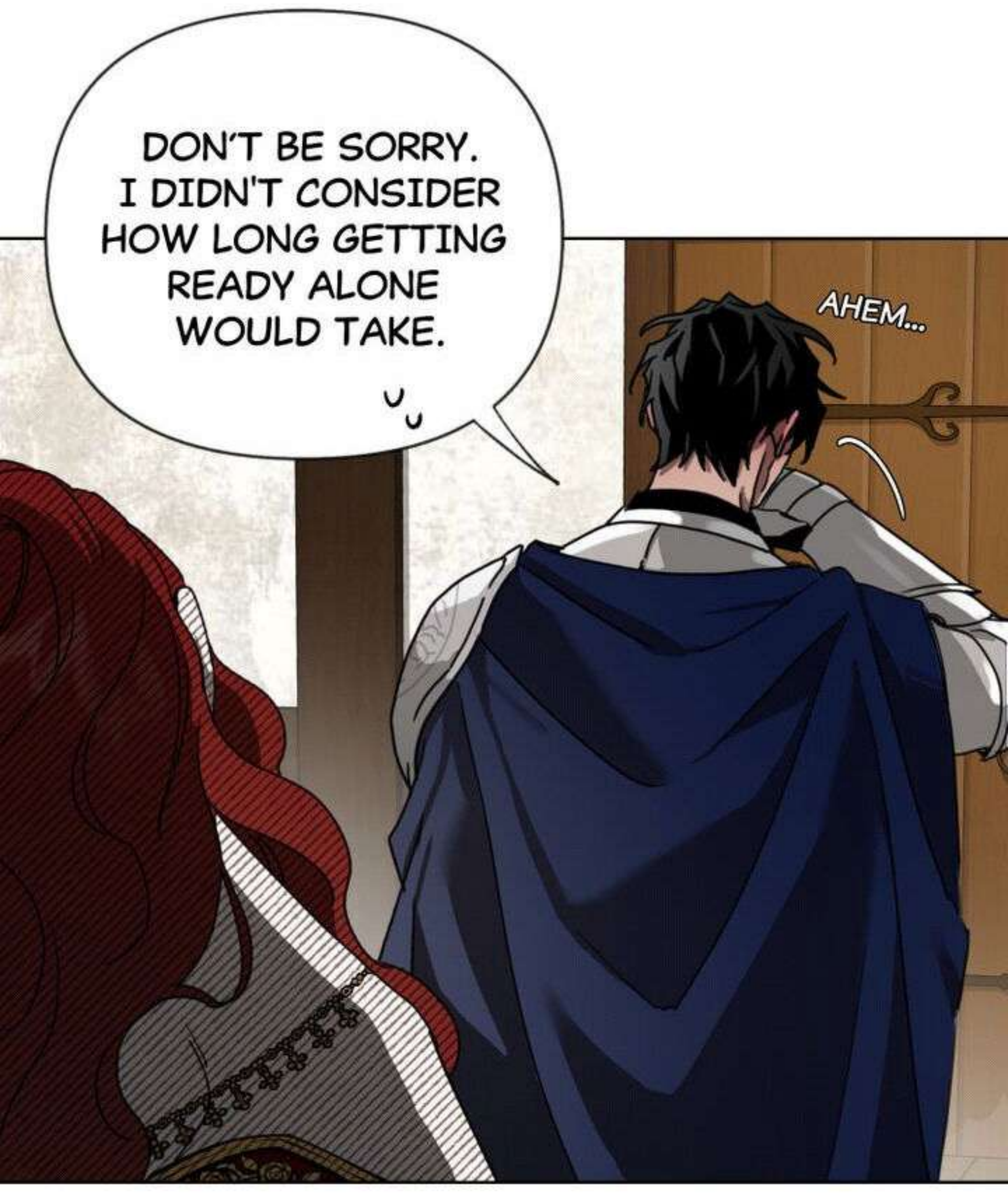

YOUR HUSBAND PREPARED THIS UNDERGARMENT FOR YOU AS WELL!
I-I CAN D-DRESS MYSELF!

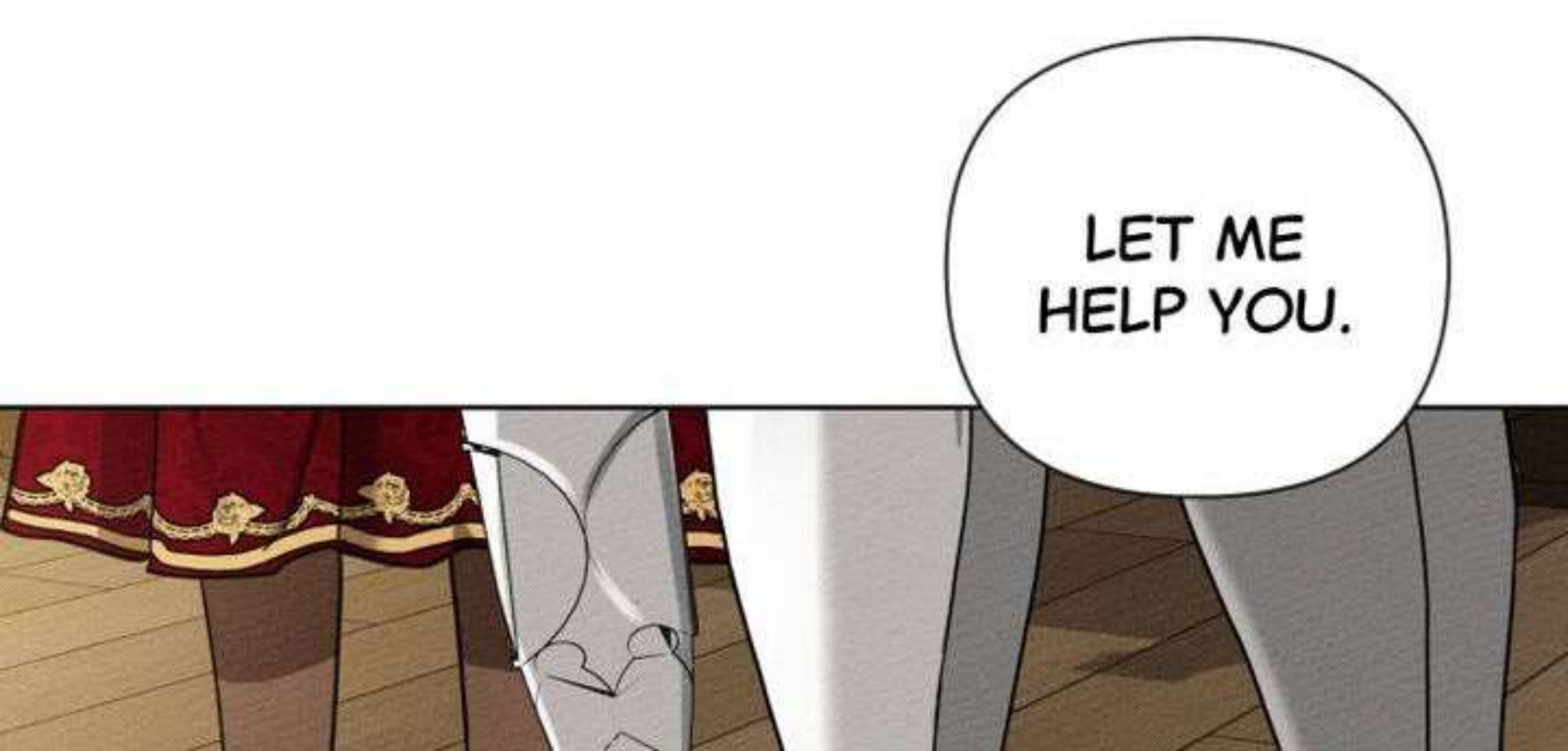
SHOULD I JUST ASK FOR ASSISTANCE? I'D RATHER NOT IF I CAN HELP IT.

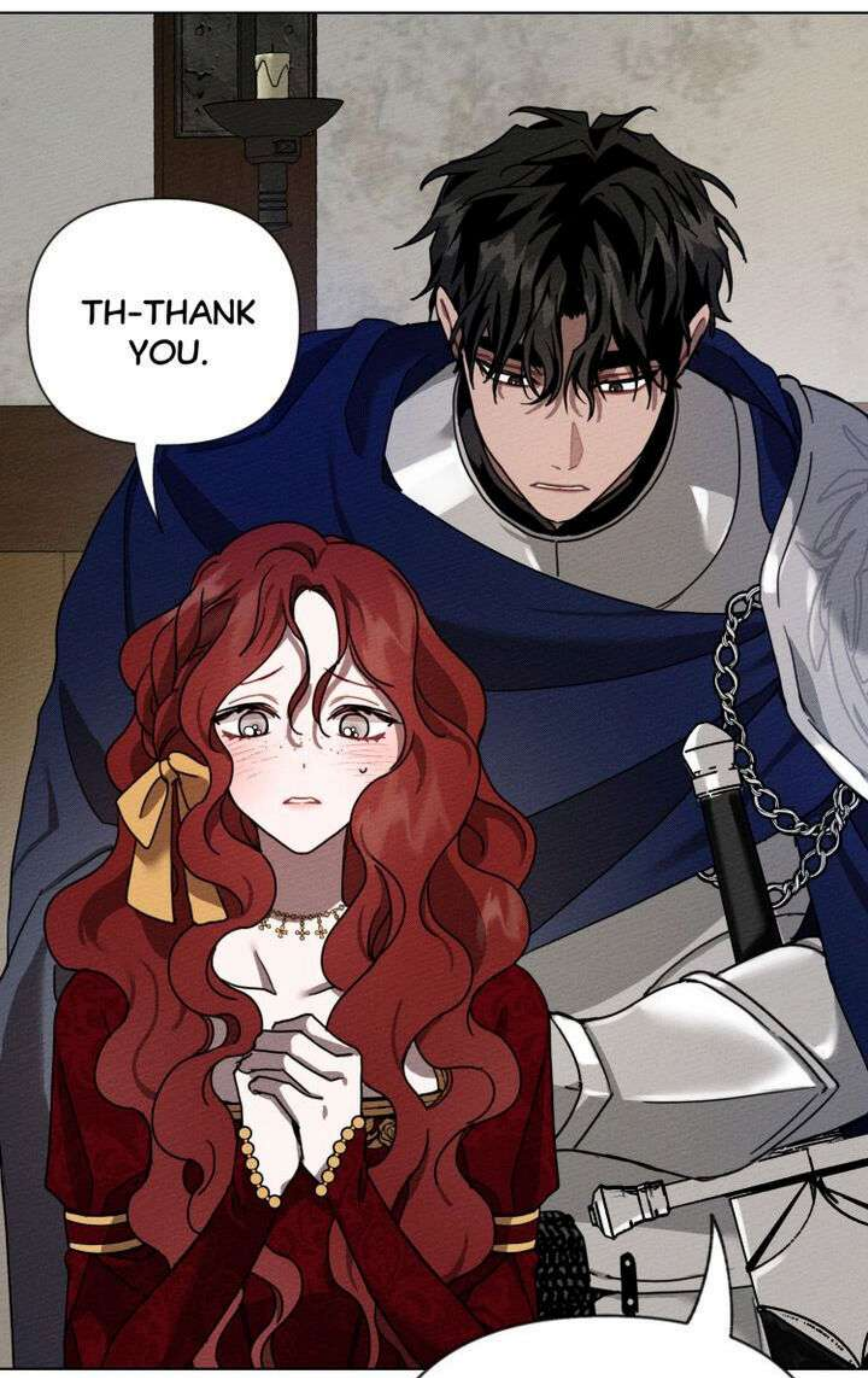

MAXI, ARE YOU D—
BURST OPEN
I-I'M S-SORRY FOR T-TAKING SO LONG.


B-BUT THIS DRESS...
RIFTAN'S VIEW

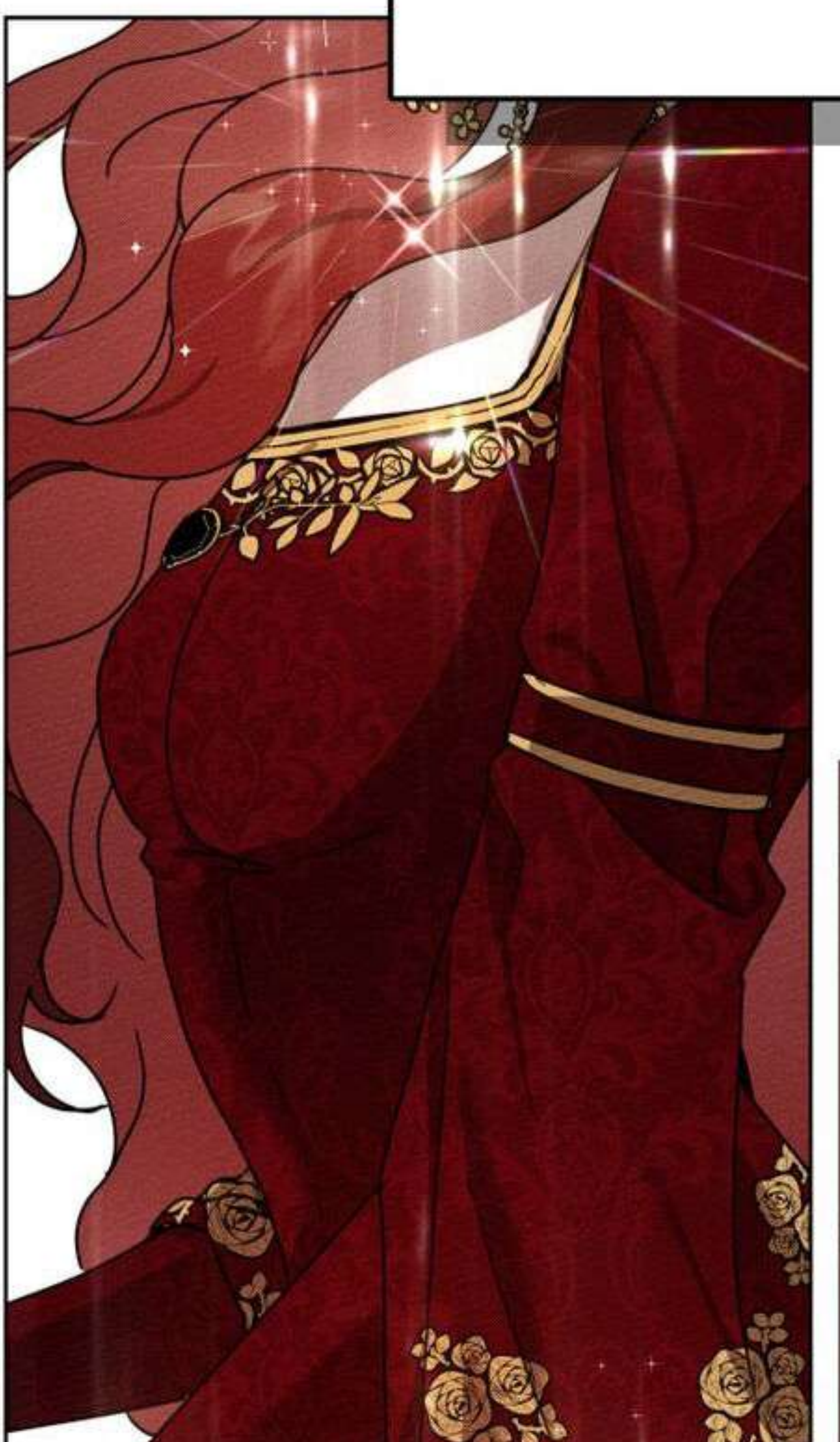

SPARKLE~

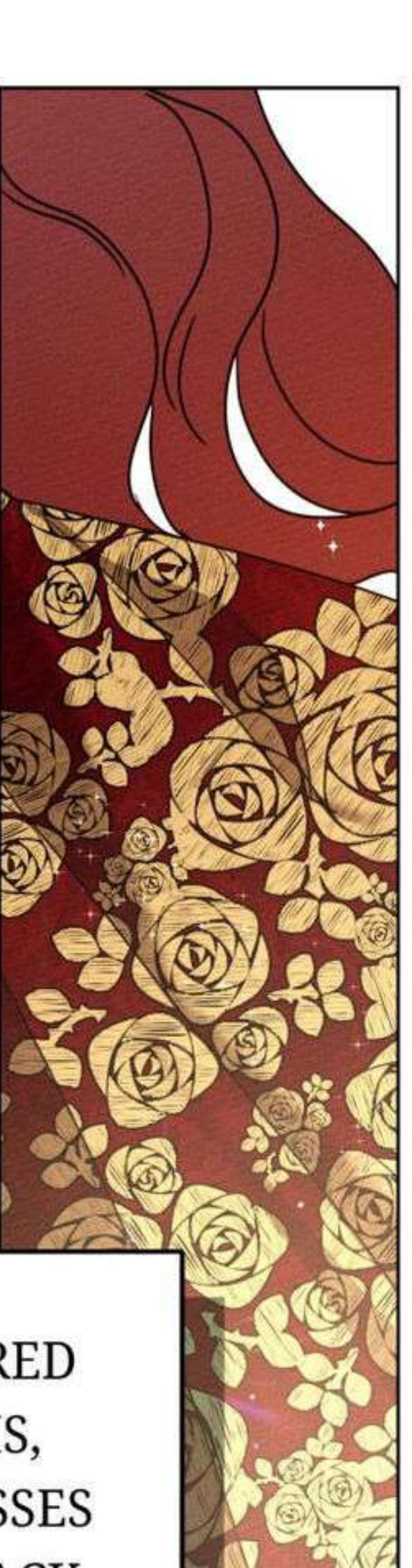

DON'T BE SORRY. I DIDN'T CONSIDER HOW LONG GETTING READY ALONE WOULD TAKE.
AHEM...


LET ME HELP YOU.


TH-THANK YOU.
THERE WASN'T MUCH TIME TO CHOOSE, SO IT MAY NOT BE TO YOUR LIKING. BUT DON'T WORRY. I'LL GET YOU A MUCH NICER ONE ONCE WE'RE HOME.

HOW COULD I NOT LIKE THIS? JUST HOW EXTRAVAGANT IS HIS TASTE?

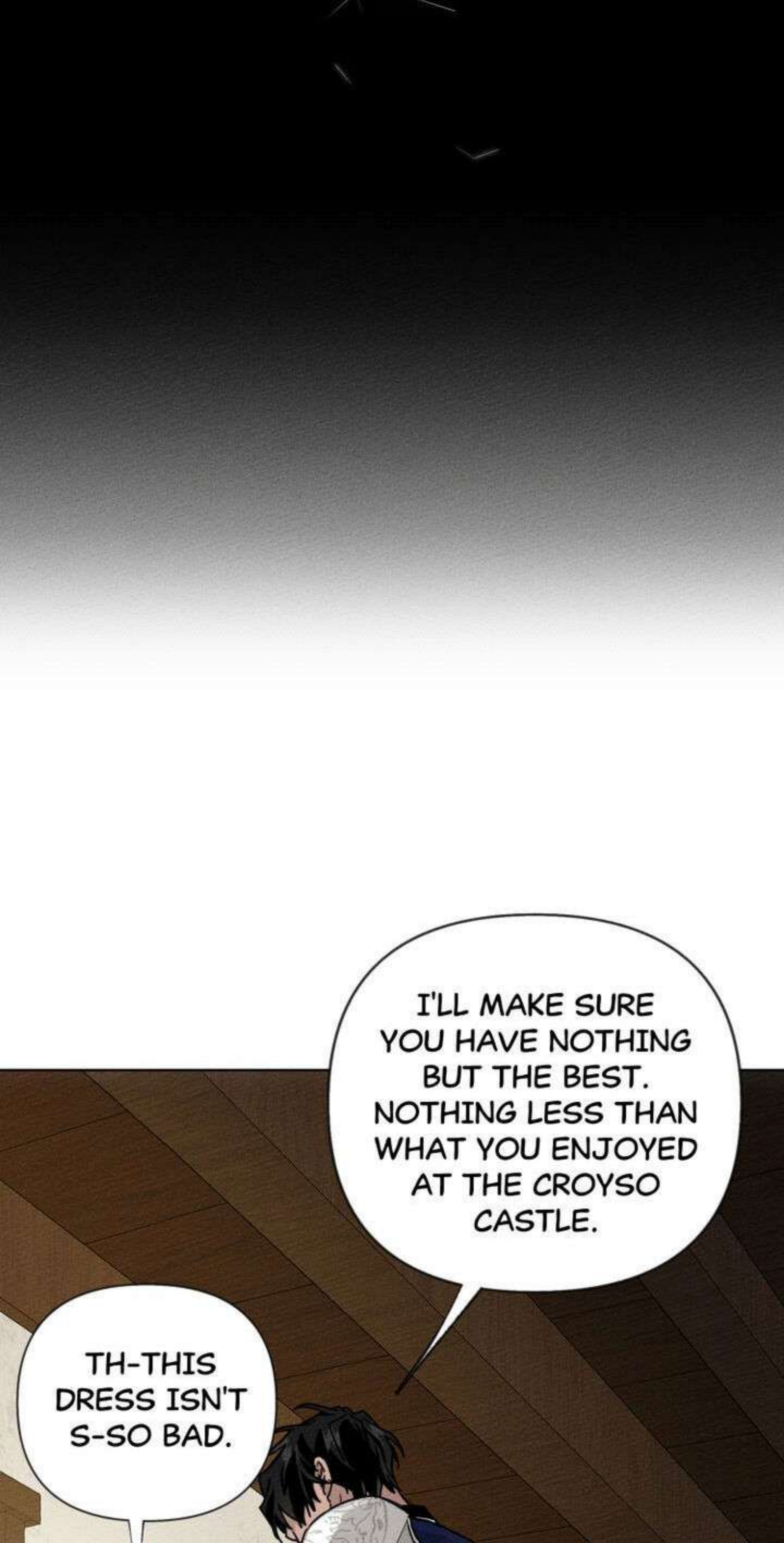


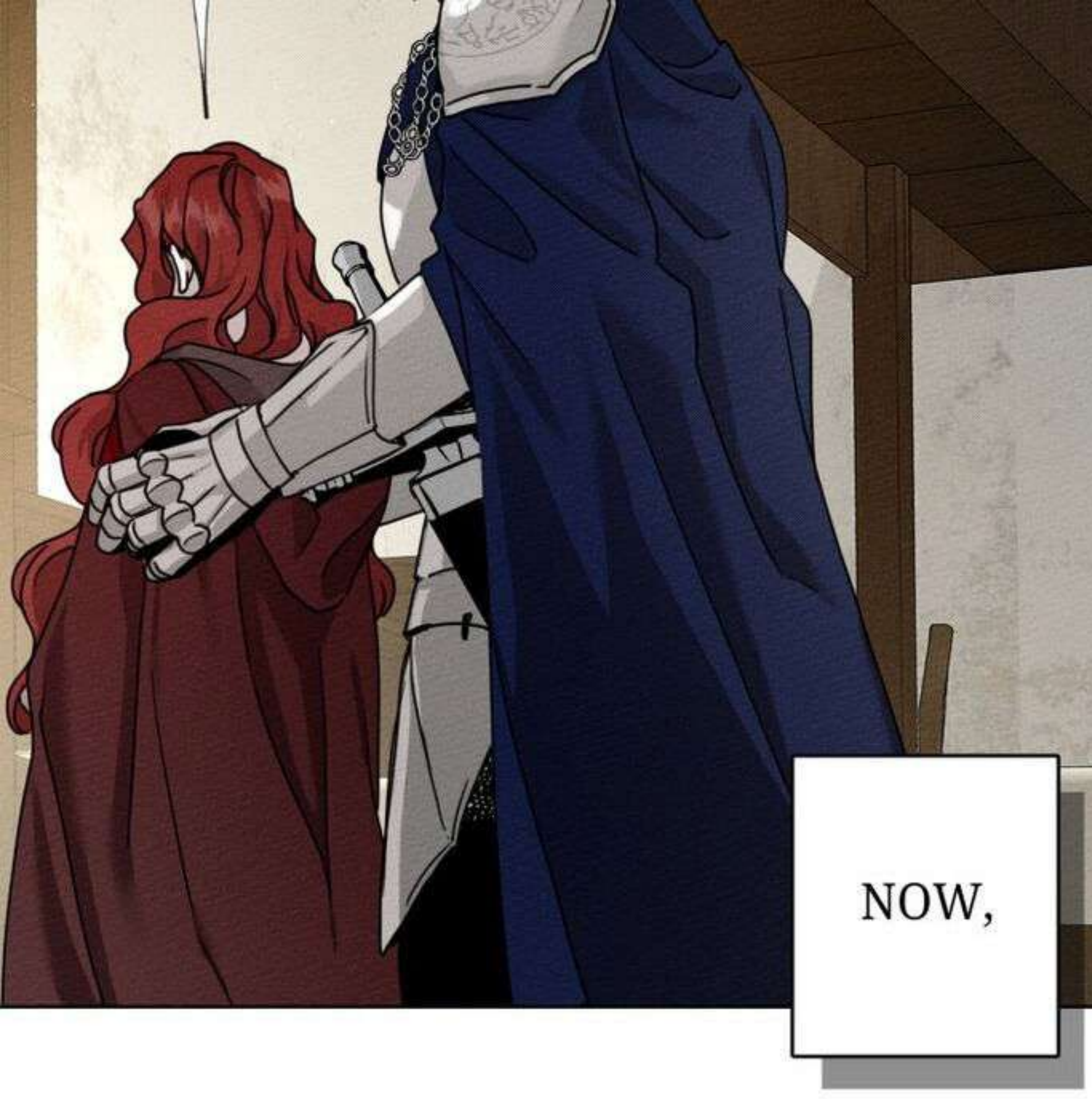

COMPARED TO THIS, THE DRESSES I HAD BACK AT THE CASTLE WERE...

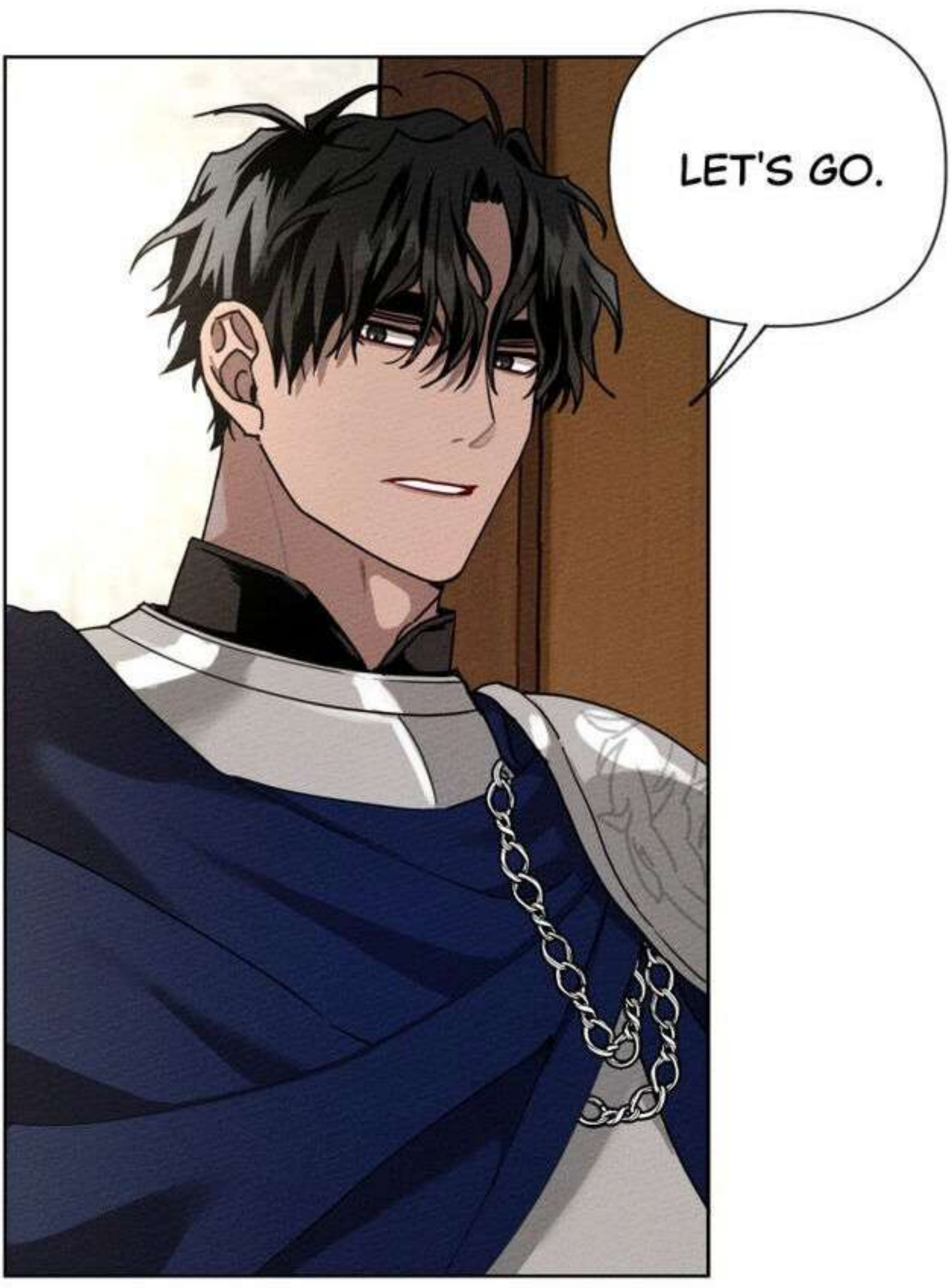
UGH, YOU'VE GROWN TALLER AGAIN?!
IT'S A GOOD THING WE HAVE SOME FABRIC LEFTOVER FROM LADY ROSETTA'S DRESS.
BEAR WITH THE DISCOMFORT. ENDURANCE IS AN IMPORTANT VIRTUE OF A LADY.

I'M NOT THE "NOBLE LADY"
RIFTAN THINKS ME TO BE.
IF HE EVER FINDS OUT...

HE'LL BE DISAPPOINTED.


I'LL MAKE SURE YOU HAVE NOTHING BUT THE BEST. NOTHING LESS THAN WHAT YOU ENJOYED AT THE CROYSO CASTLE.
TH-THIS DRESS ISN'T S-SO BAD.

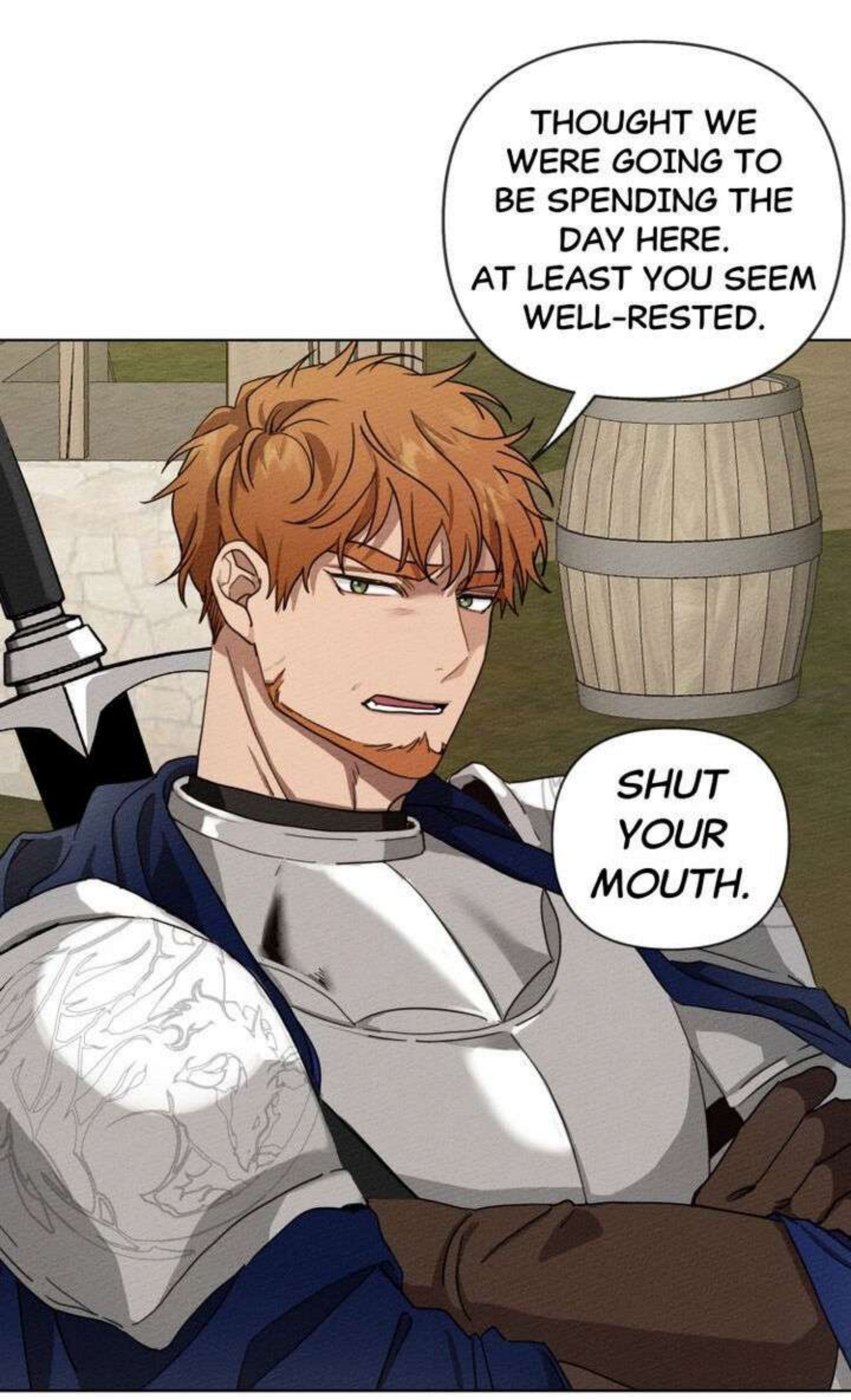

NOW,

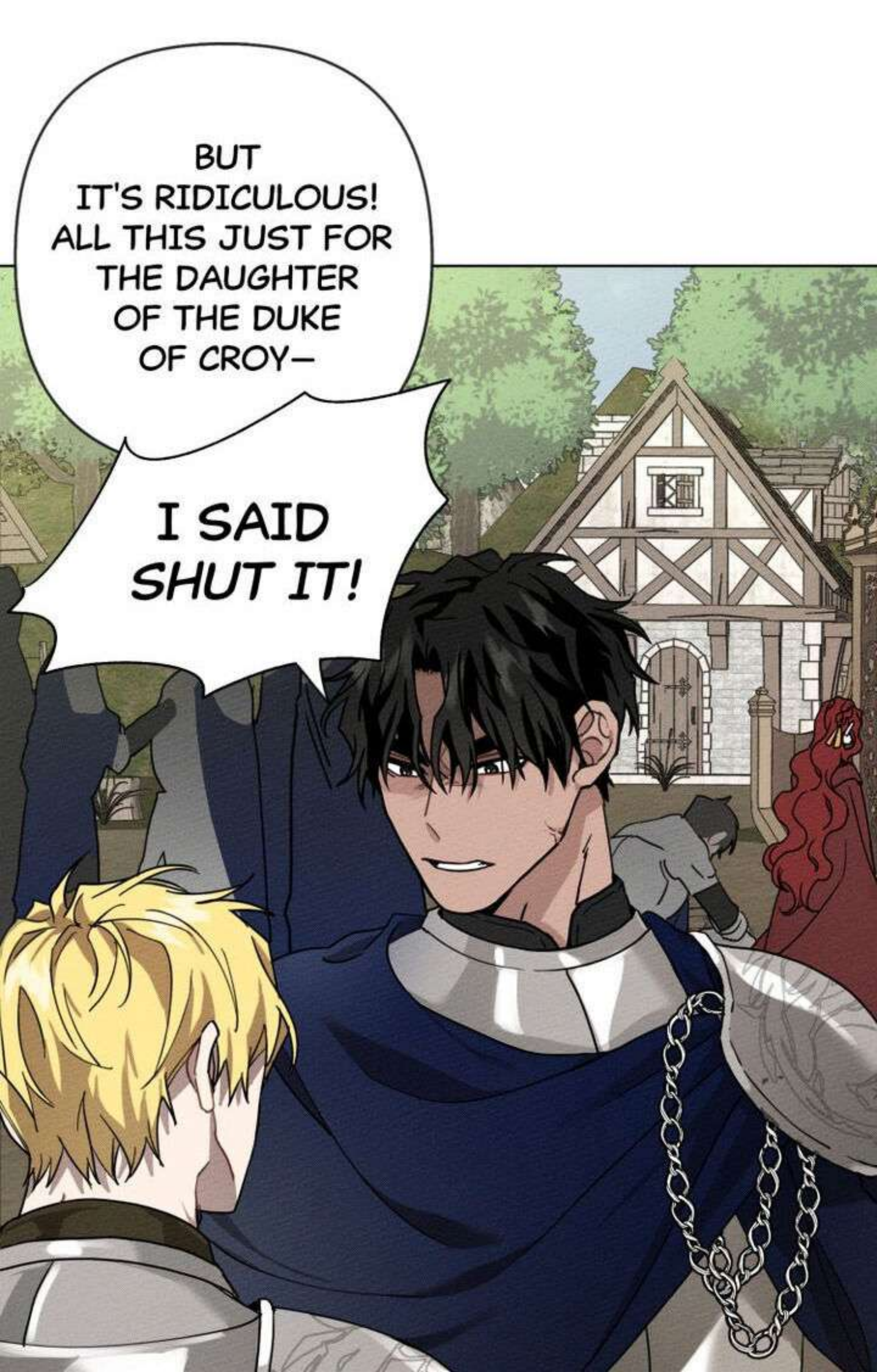

LET'S GO.

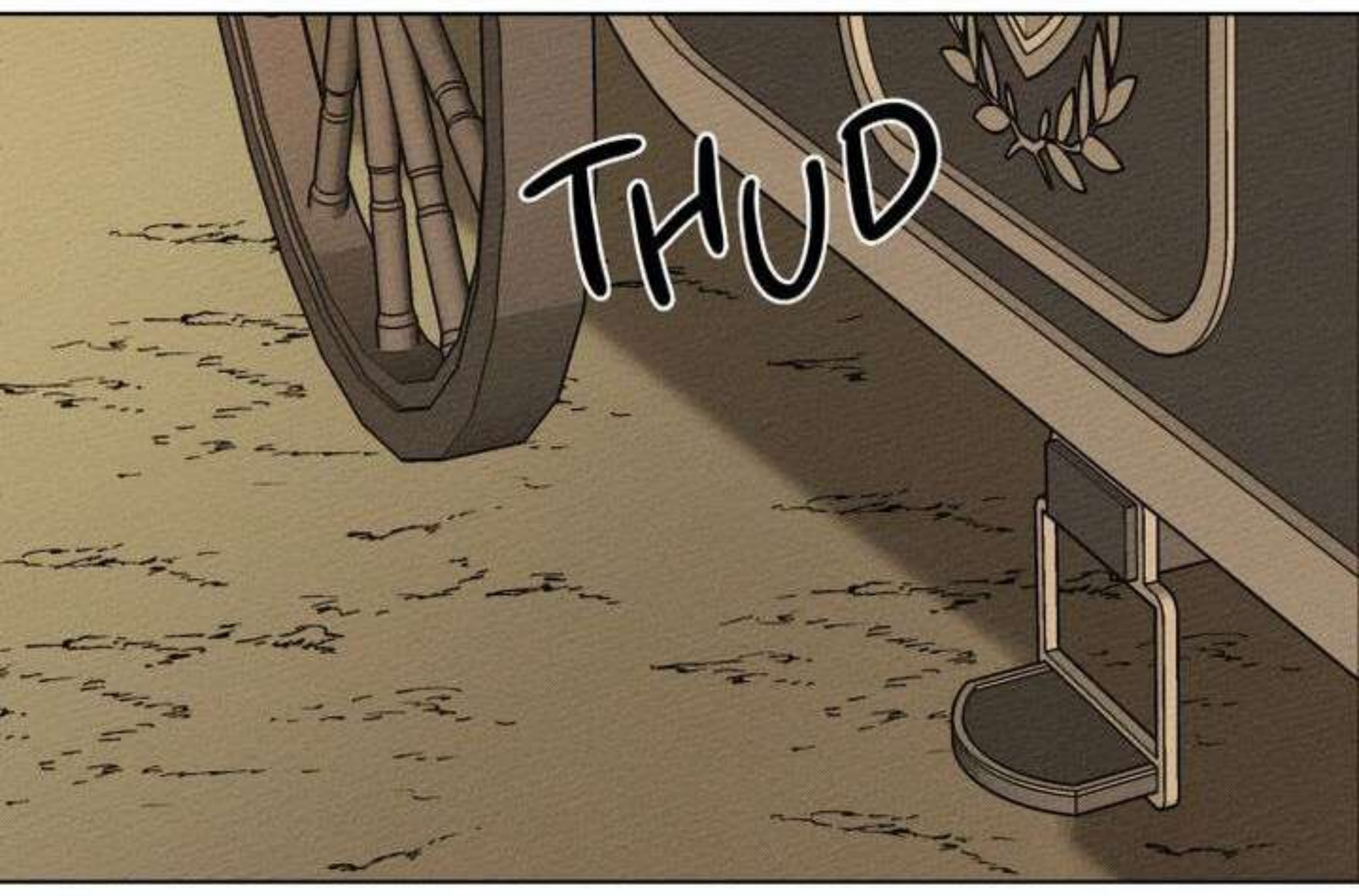
I DON'T WANT HIM TO FIND OUT.

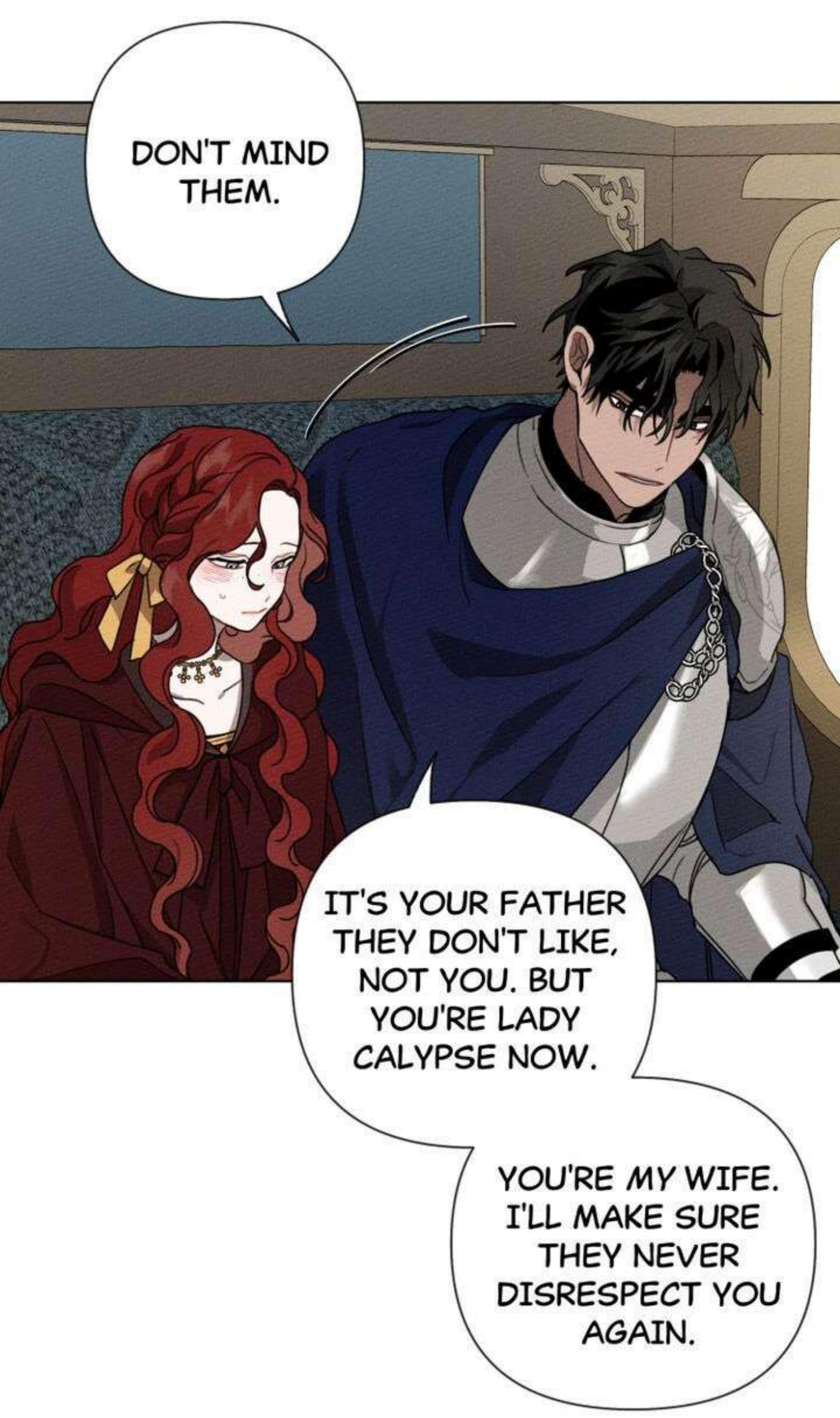
BUSTLE
BUSTLE

BUSTLE

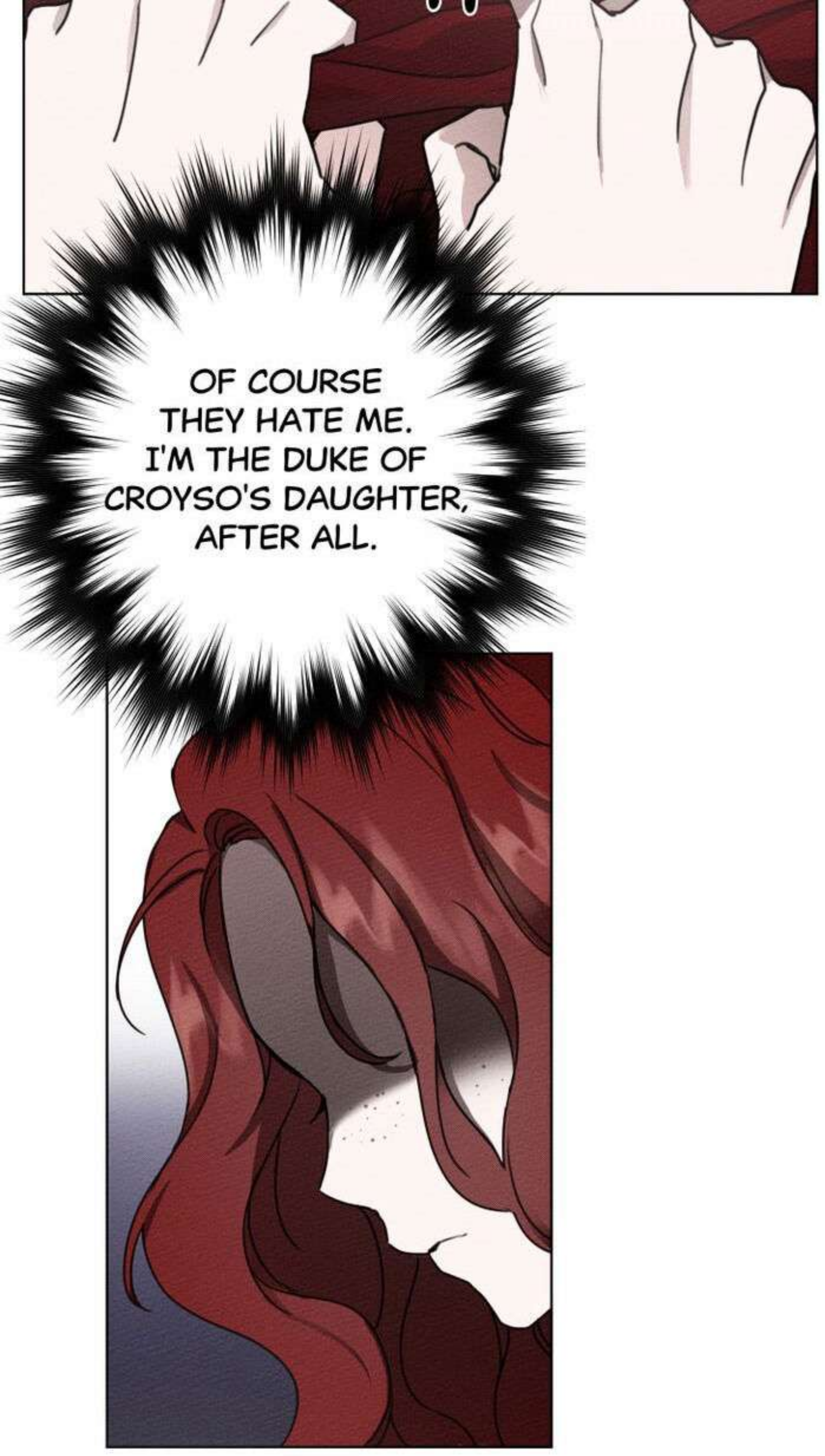

THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO BE SPENDING THE DAY HERE. AT LEAST YOU SEEM WELL-RESTED.
SHUT YOUR MOUTH.


BUT IT'S RIDICULOUS! ALL THIS JUST FOR THE DAUGHTER OF THE DUKE OF CROY—
I SAID SHUT IT!

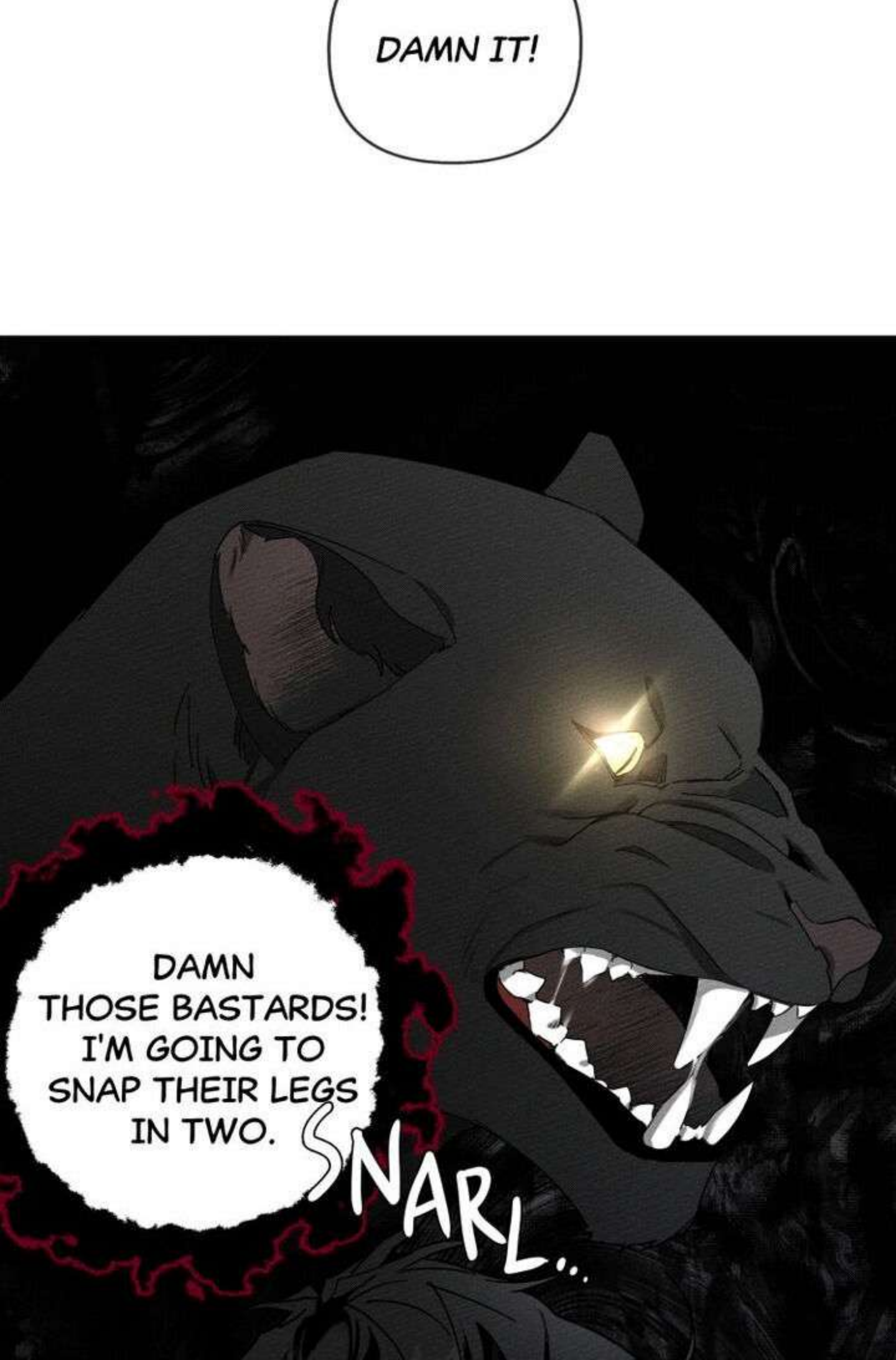

THUD

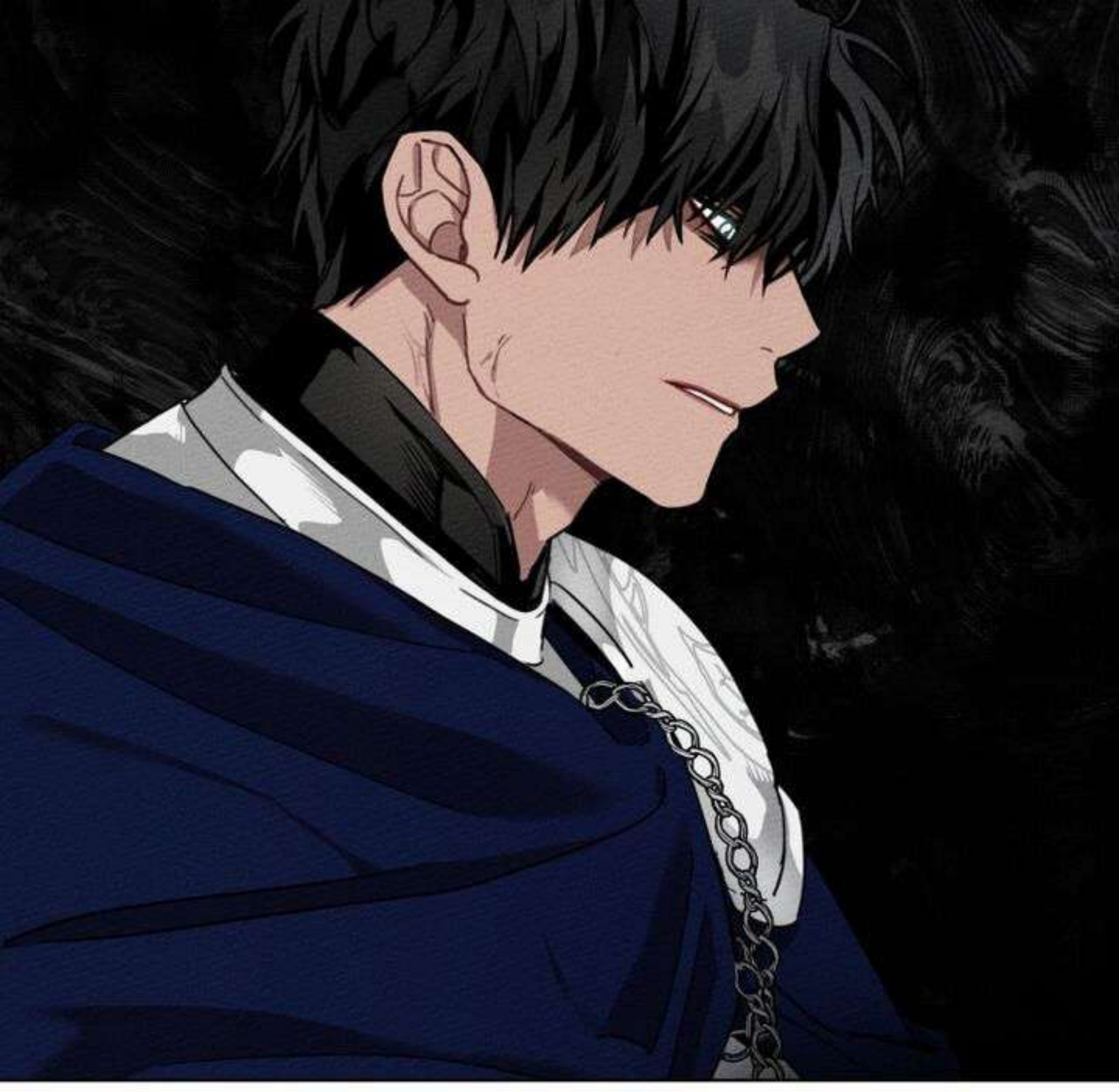

DON'T MIND THEM.
IT'S YOUR FATHER THEY DON'T LIKE, NOT YOU. BUT YOU'RE LADY CALYPSE NOW.
YOU'RE MY WIFE. I'LL MAKE SURE THEY NEVER DISRESPECT YOU AGAIN.

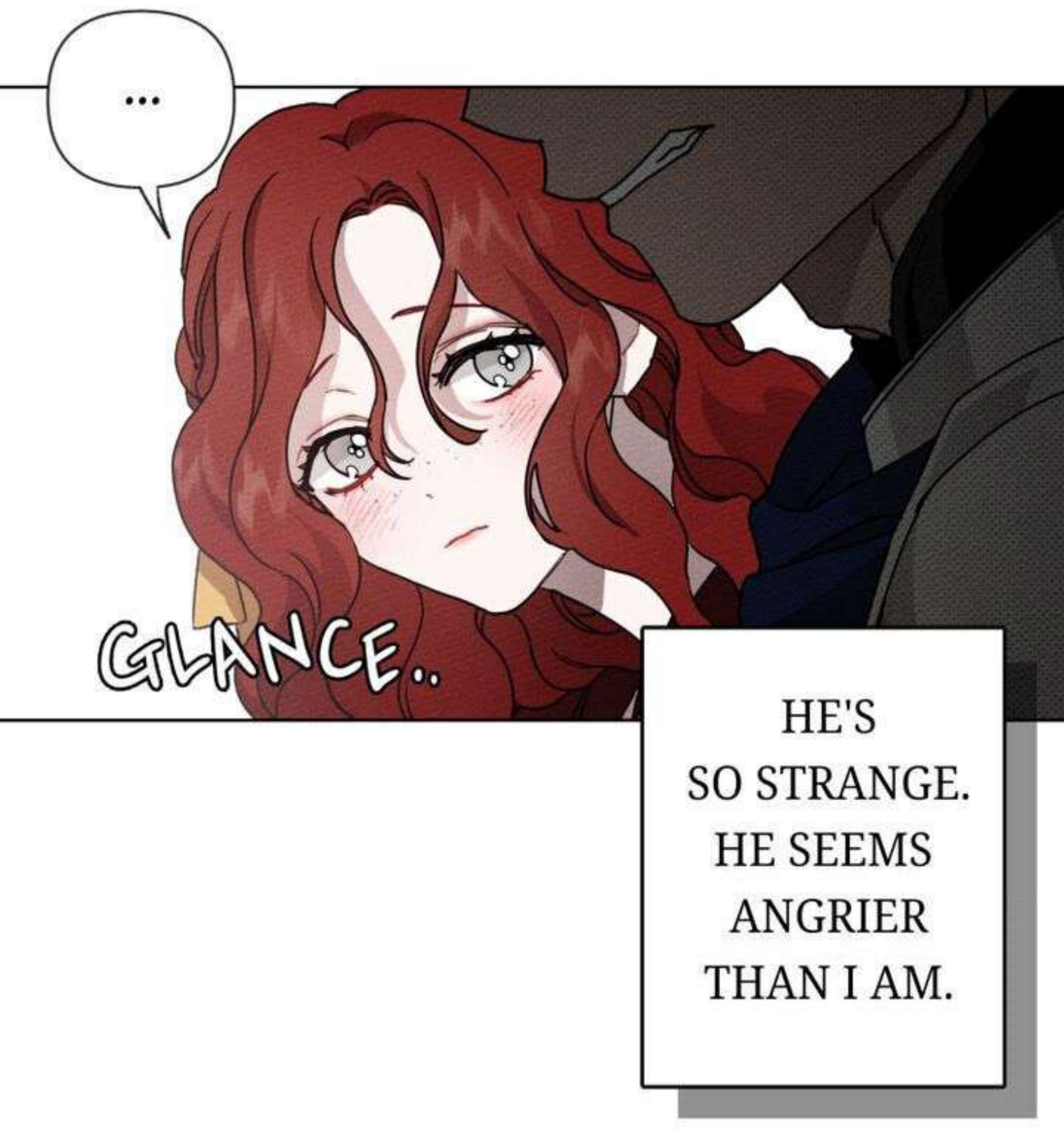
CLENCH

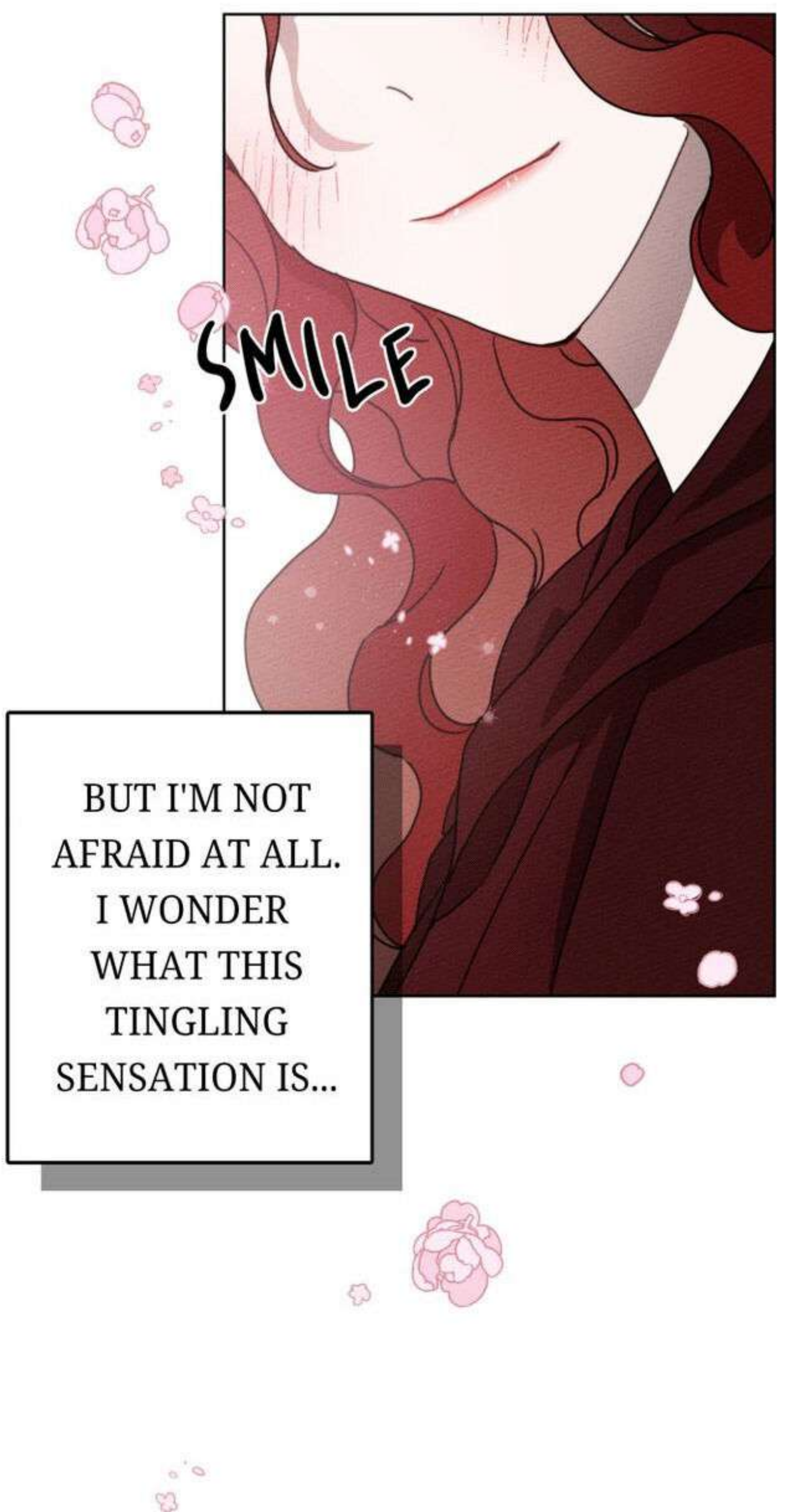

OF COURSE THEY HATE ME. I'M THE DUKE OF CROYSO'S DAUGHTER, AFTER ALL.

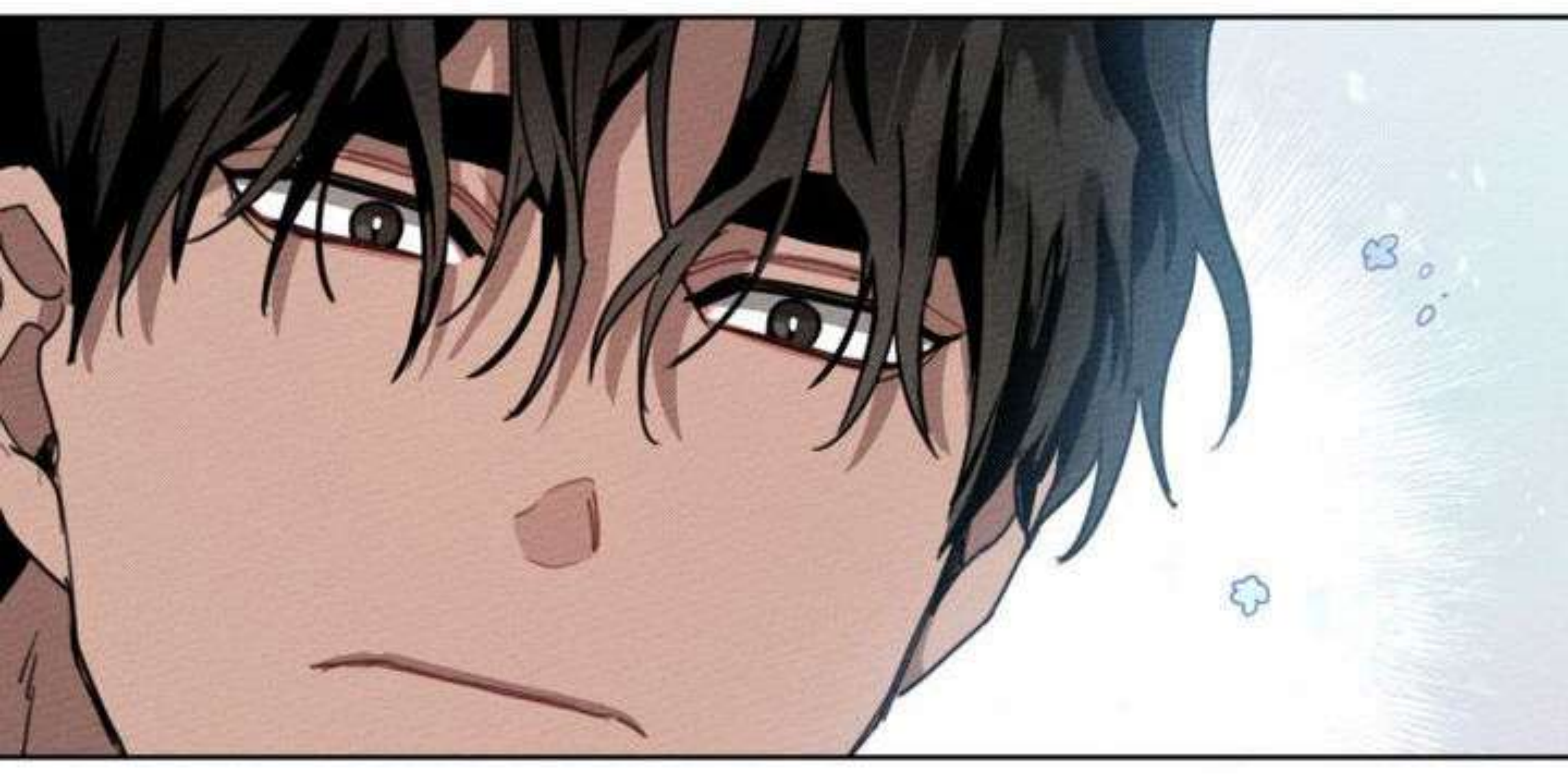
DAMN IT!

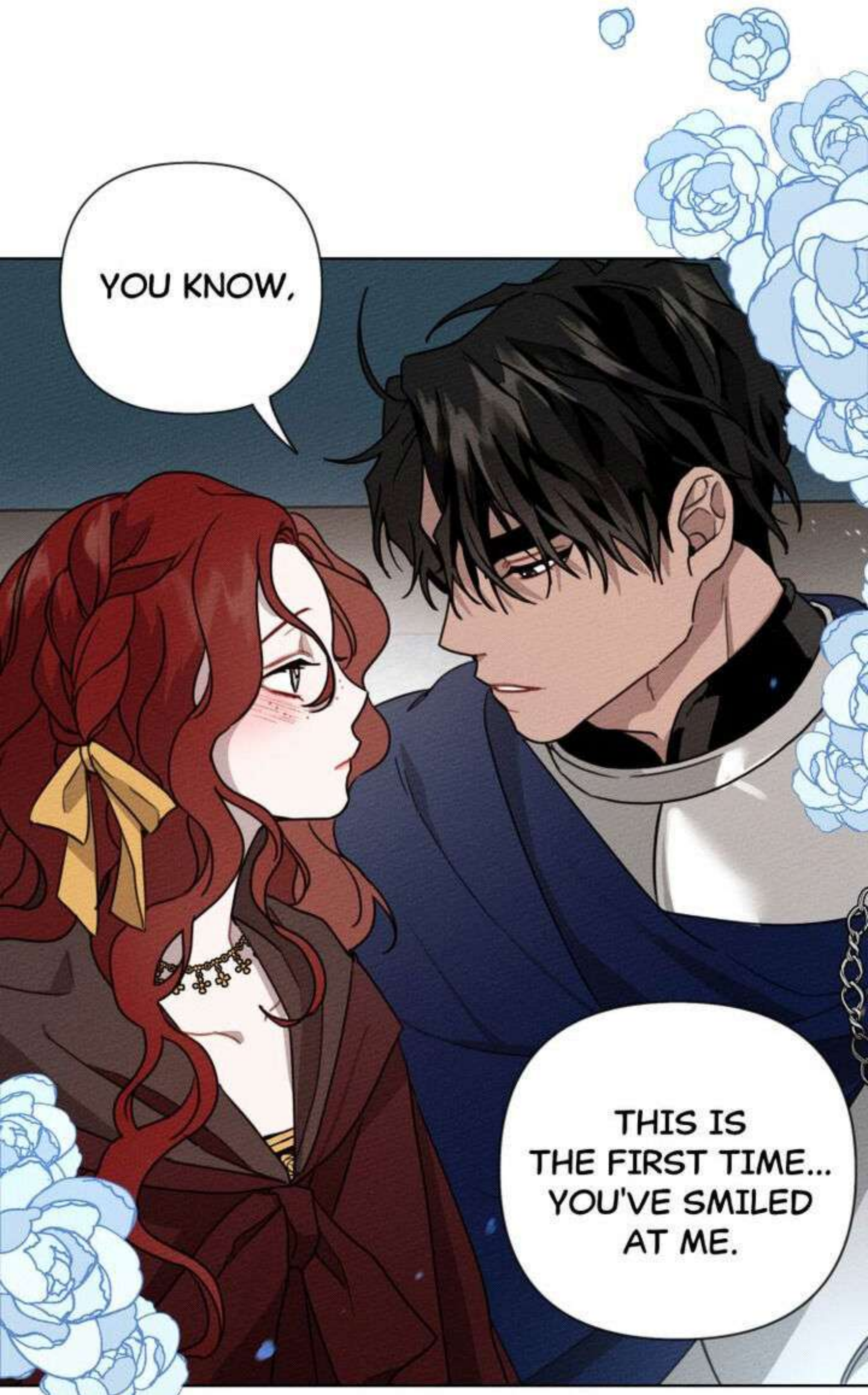

DAMN THOSE BASTARDS! I'M GOING TO SNAP THEIR LEGS IN TWO.
SNARL...

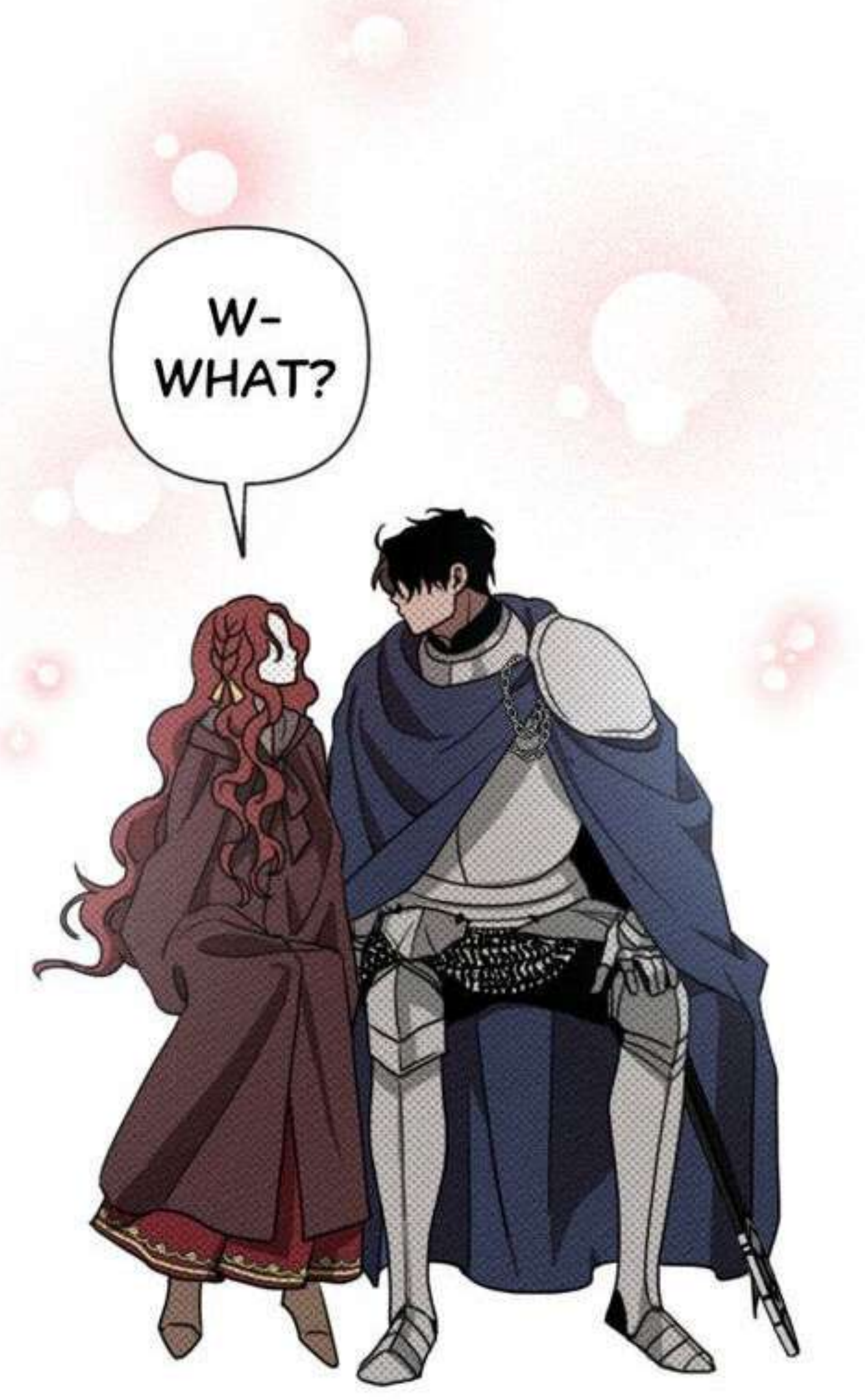


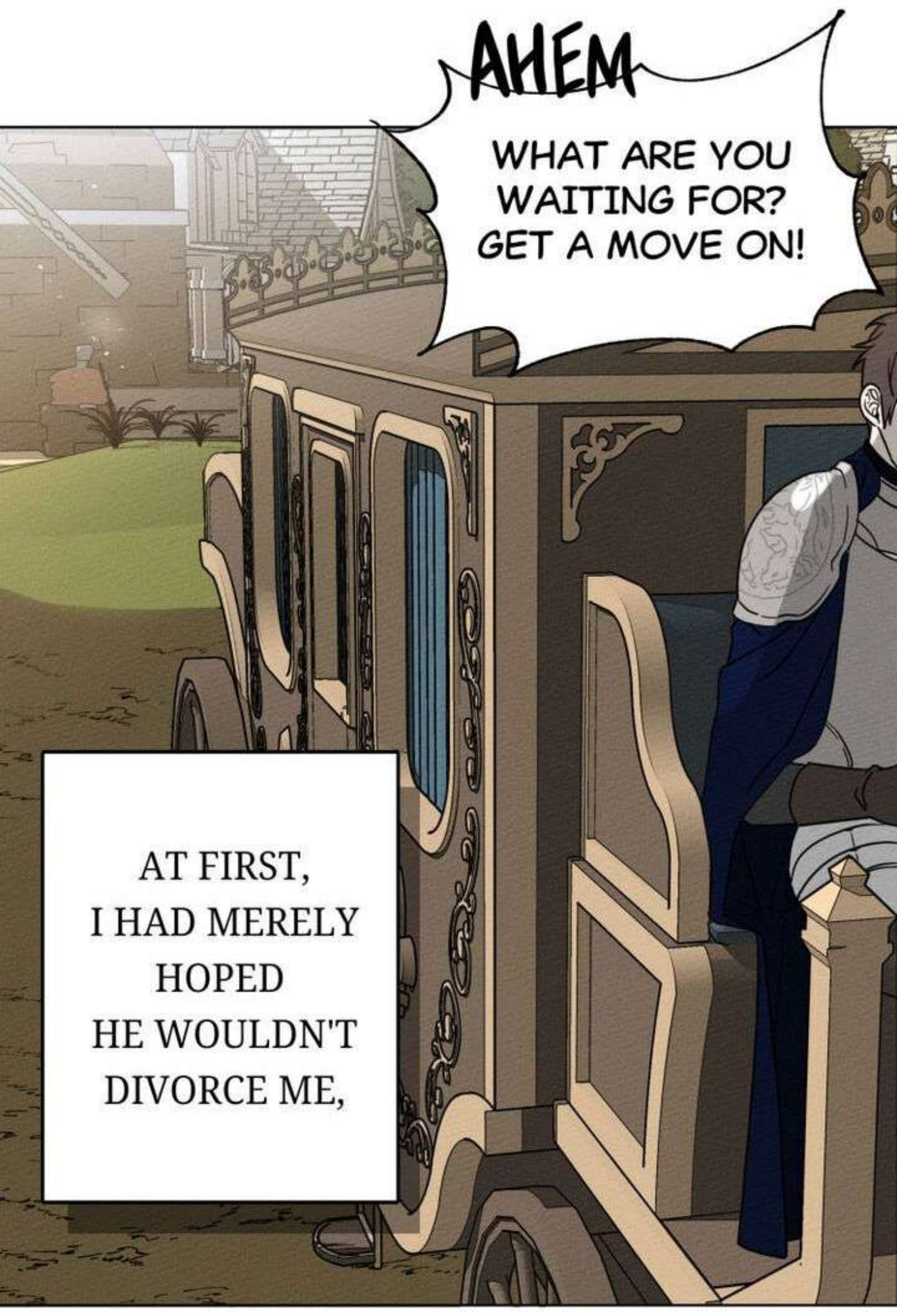

...
GLANCE..
HE'S SO STRANGE. HE SEEMS ANGRIER THAN I AM.


SMILE
BUT I'M NOT AFRAID AT ALL. I WONDER WHAT THIS TINGLING SENSATION IS...

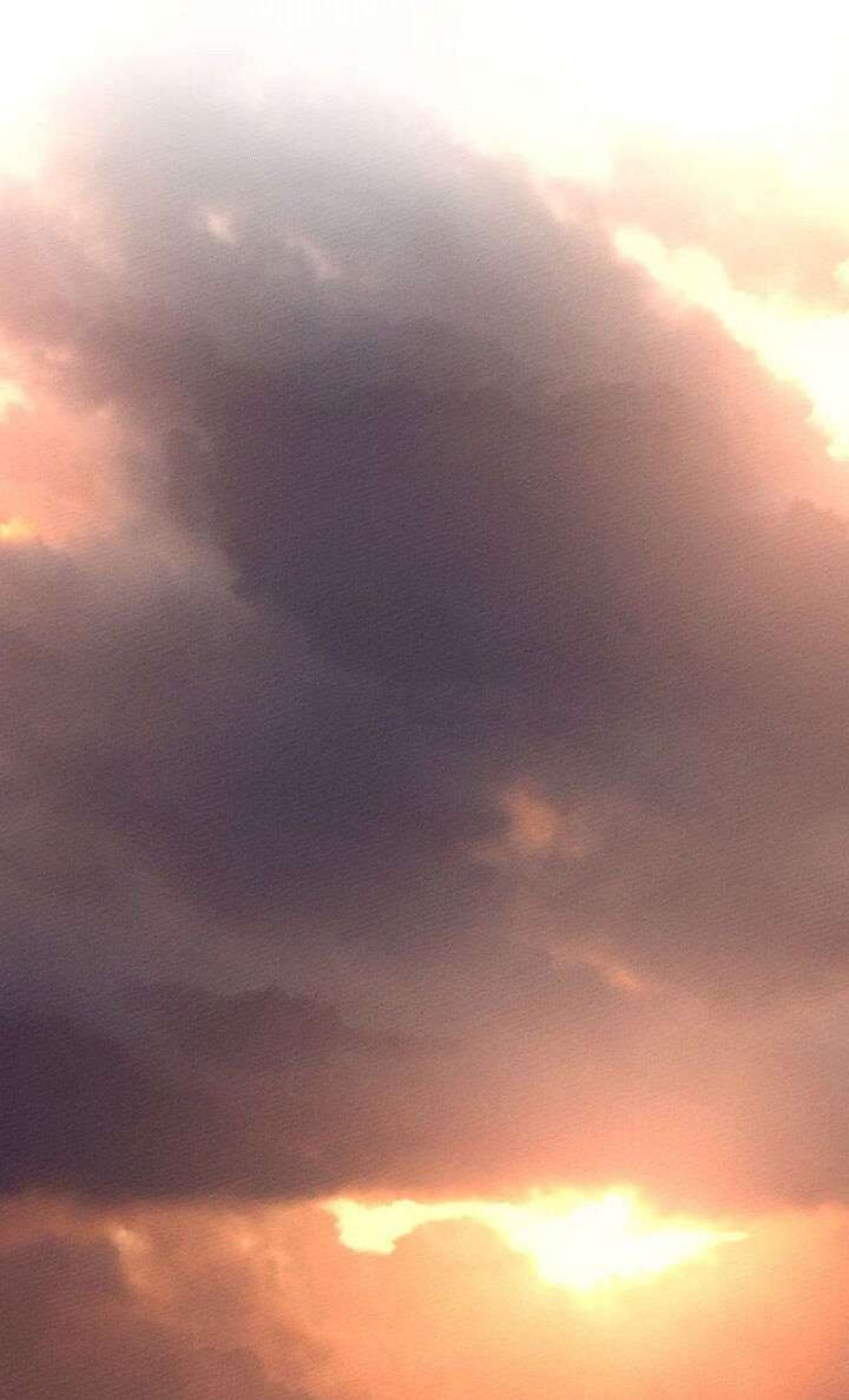


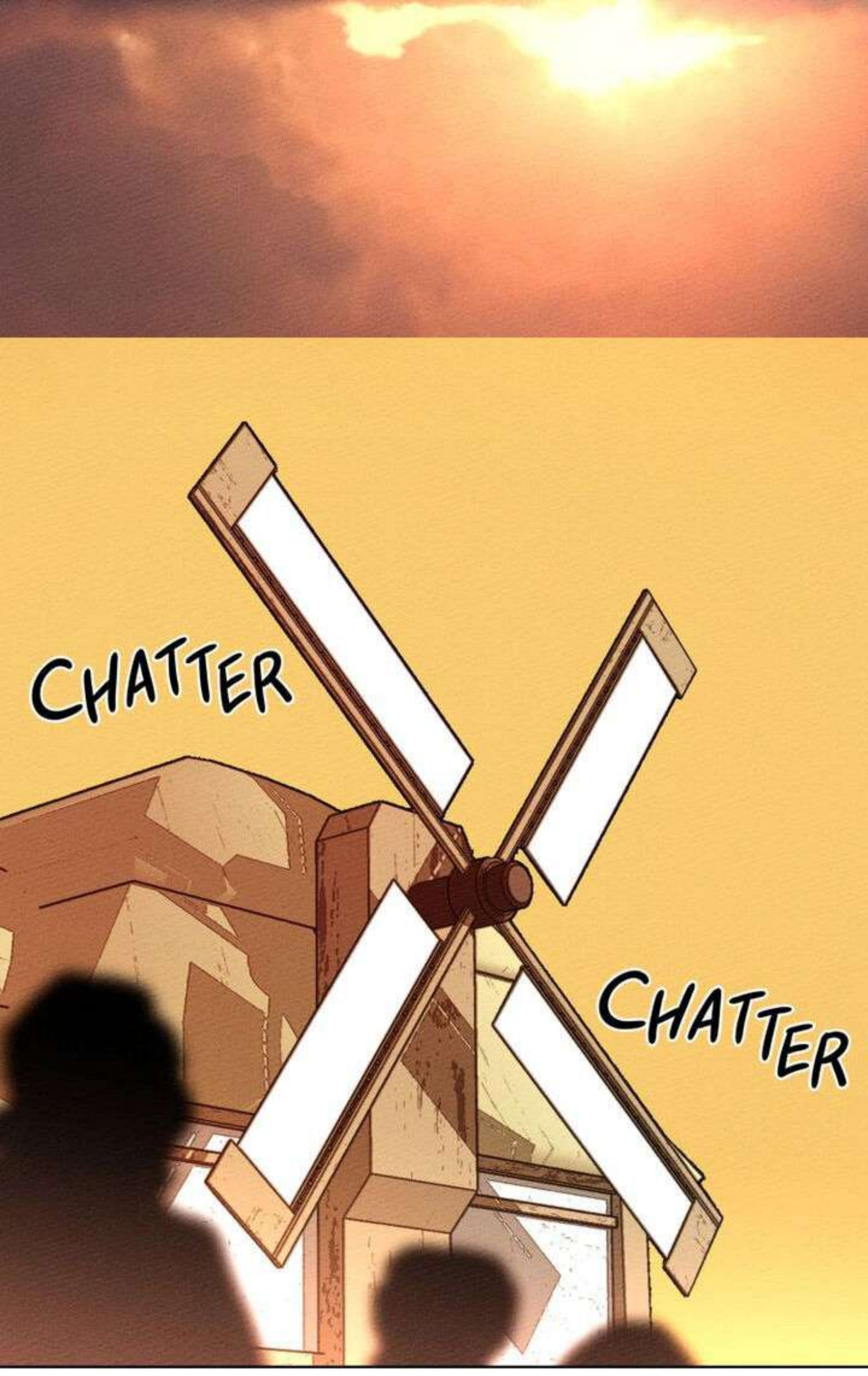

YOU KNOW,
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME... YOU'VE SMILED AT ME.

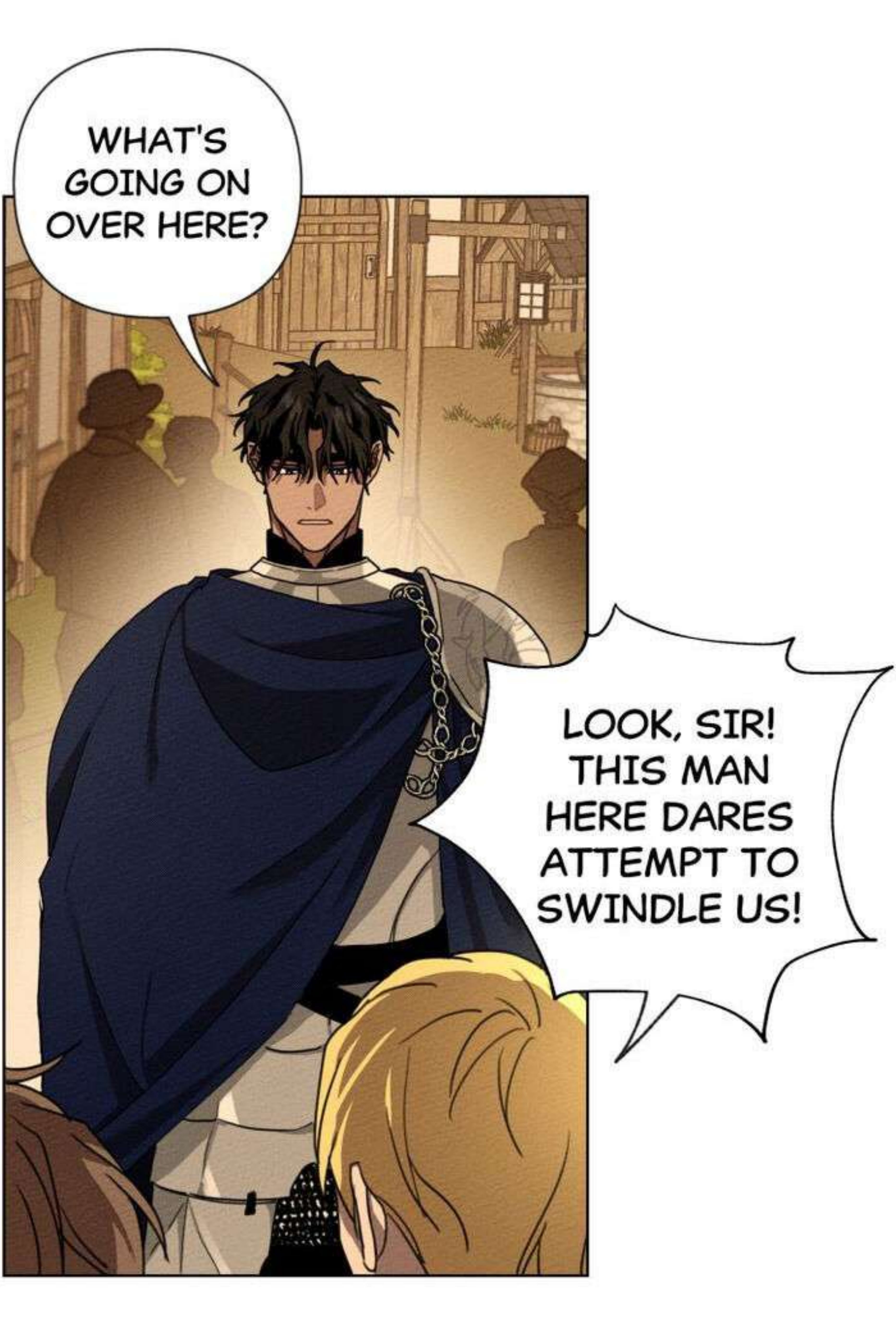


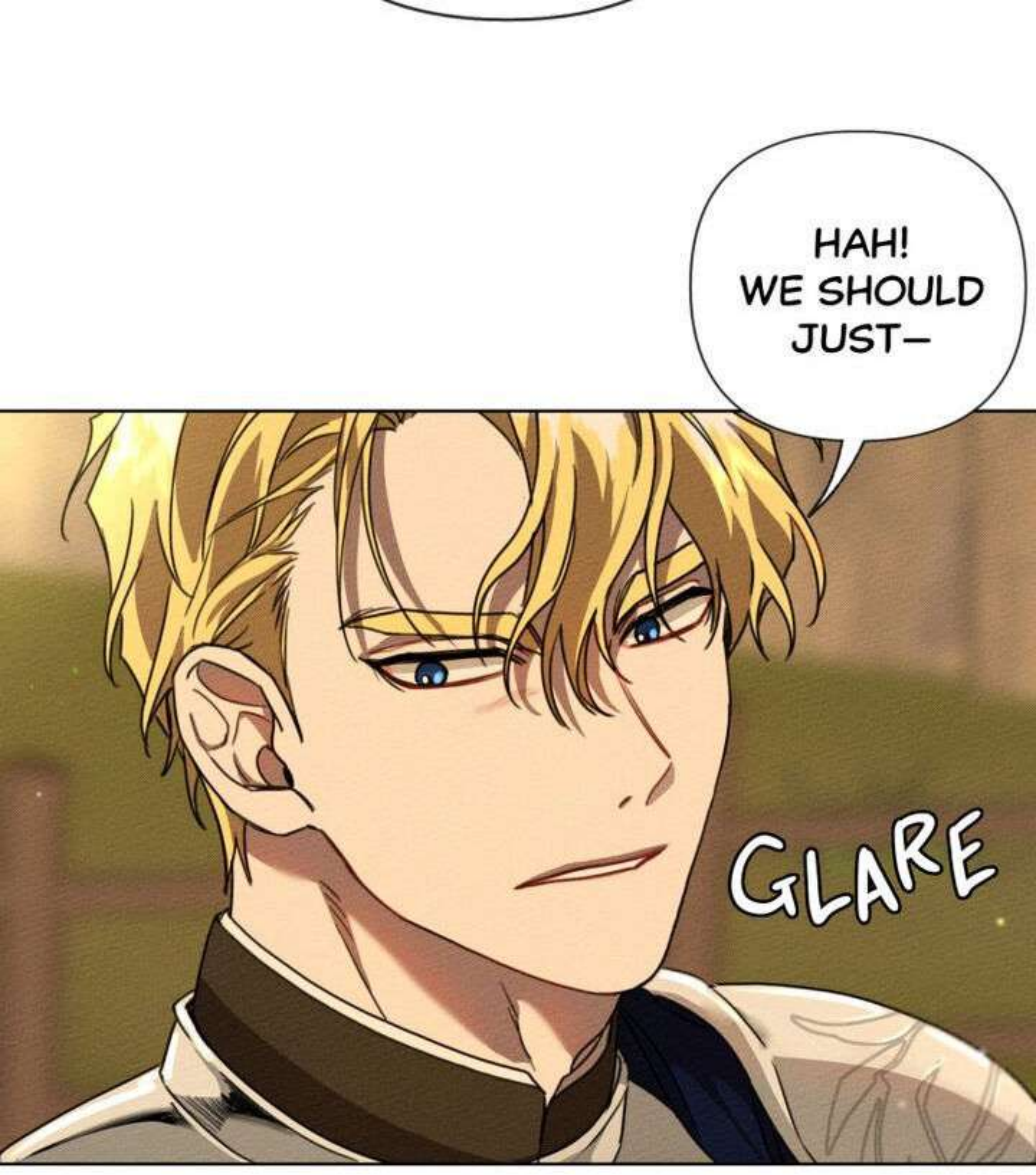

AHEM
WHAT ARE YOU
WAITING FOR?
GET A MOVE ON!
AT FIRST,
I HAD MERELY
HOPED
HE WOULDN'T
DIVORCE ME,

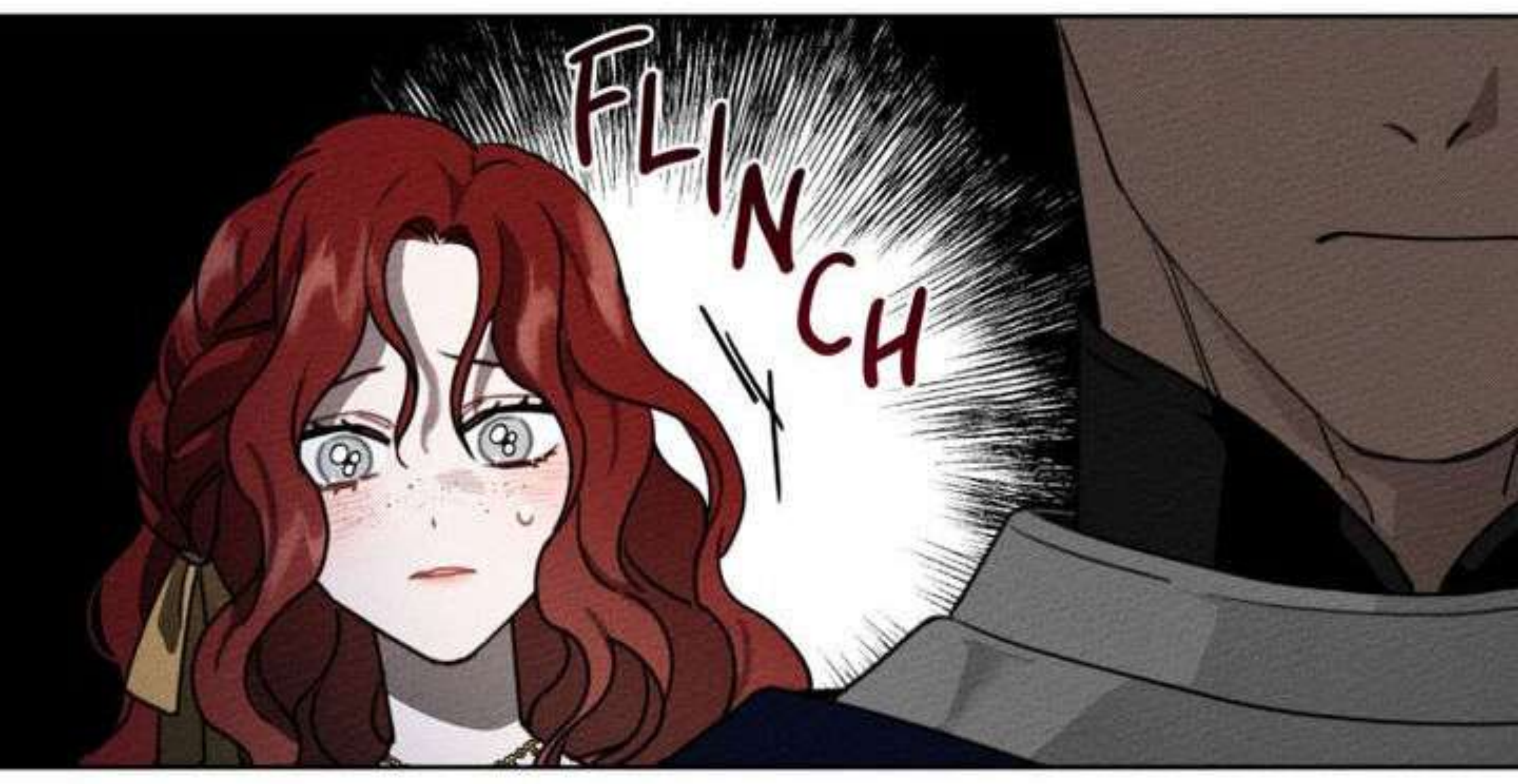
BUT NOW
I NEVER WANT
TO LEAVE
HIS SIDE.
I'M GETTING
GREEDY.

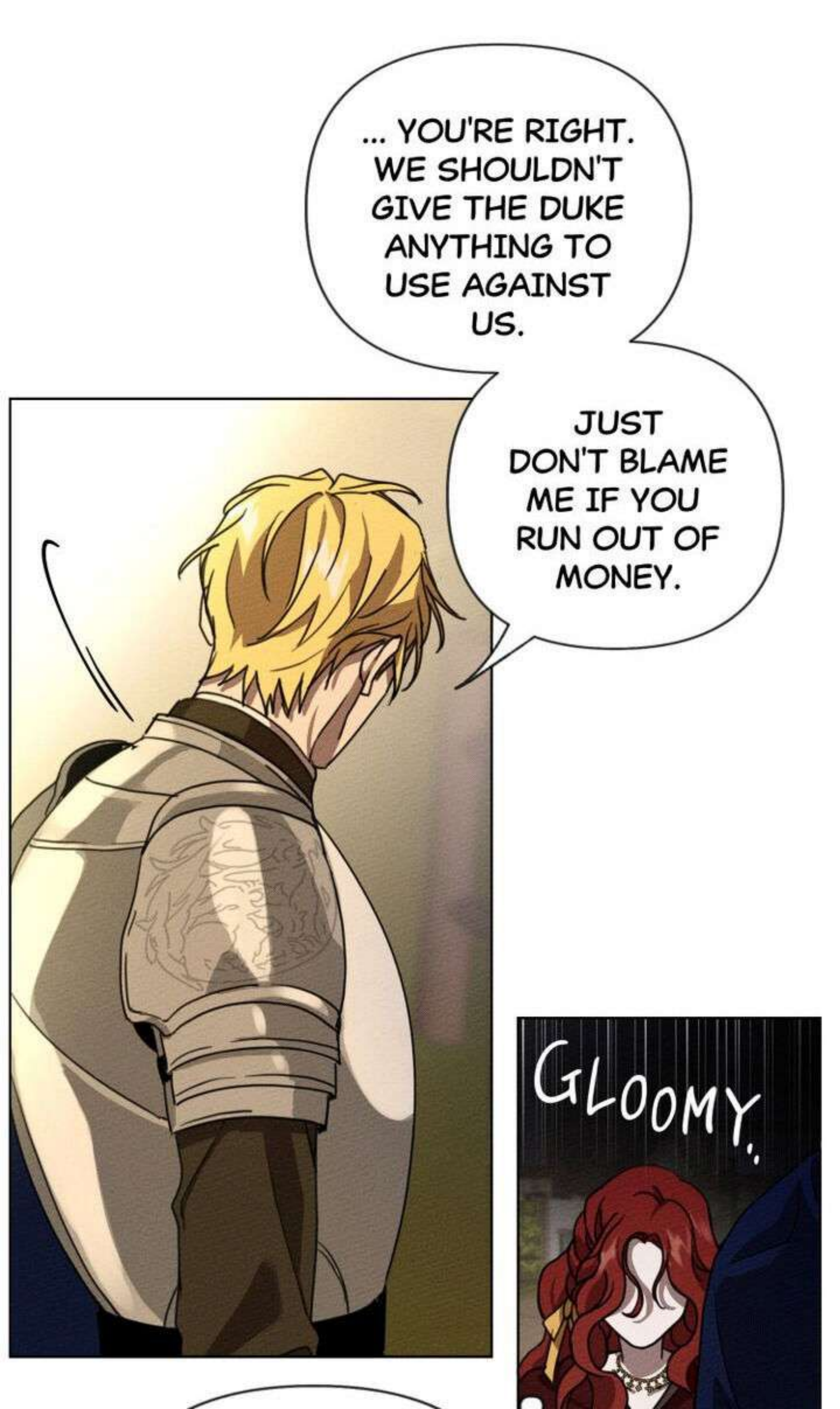



CHATTER
CHATTER

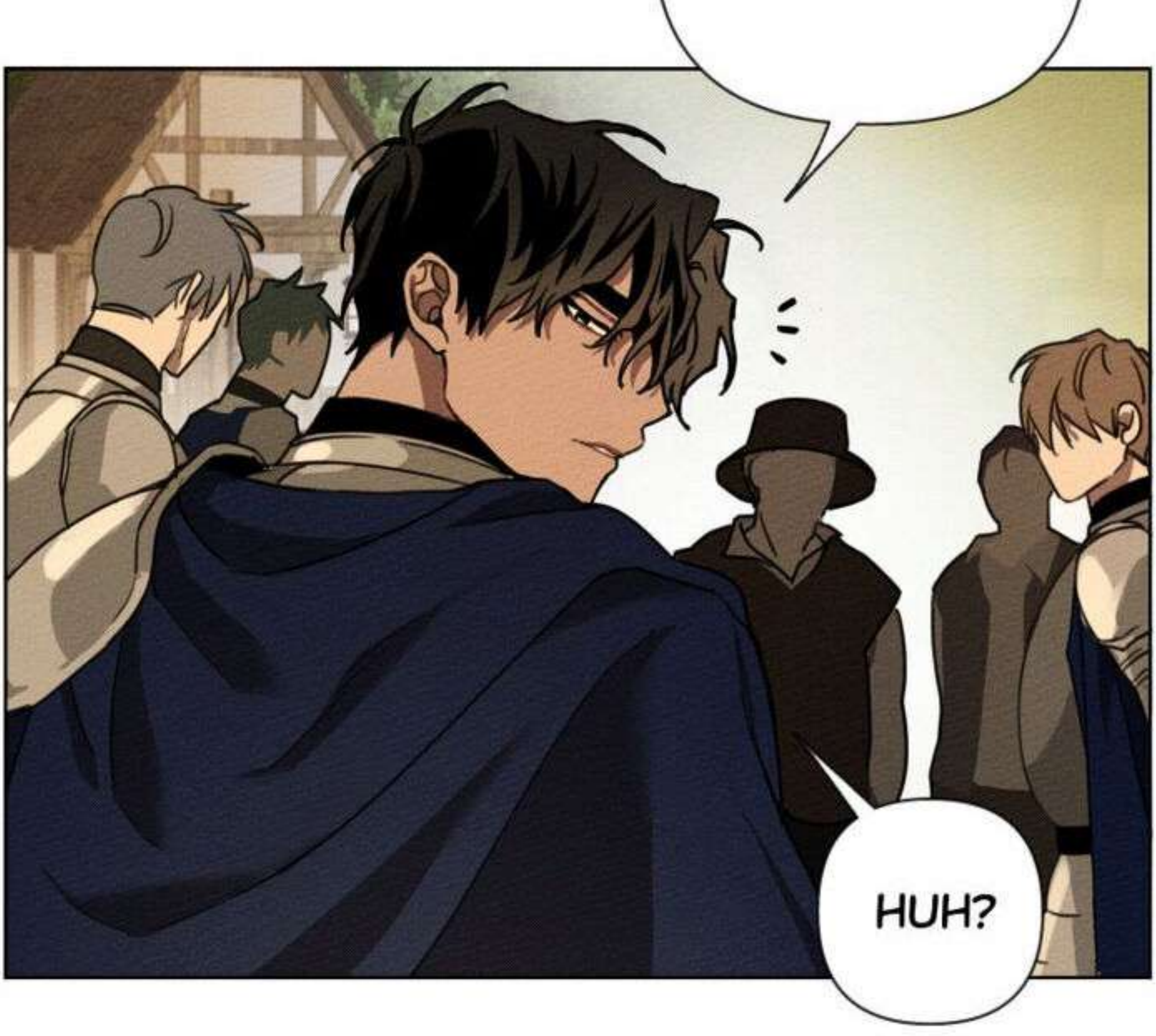

WHAT'S GOING ON OVER HERE?
LOOK, SIR! THIS MAN HERE DARES ATTEMPT TO SWINDLE US!
KEEP IT DOWN. WE'RE STILL ON THE DUKE'S LANDS. JUST PAY HIM WHAT HE WANTS AND DON'T MAKE A FUSS.


HAH!
WE SHOULD
JUST—
GLARE

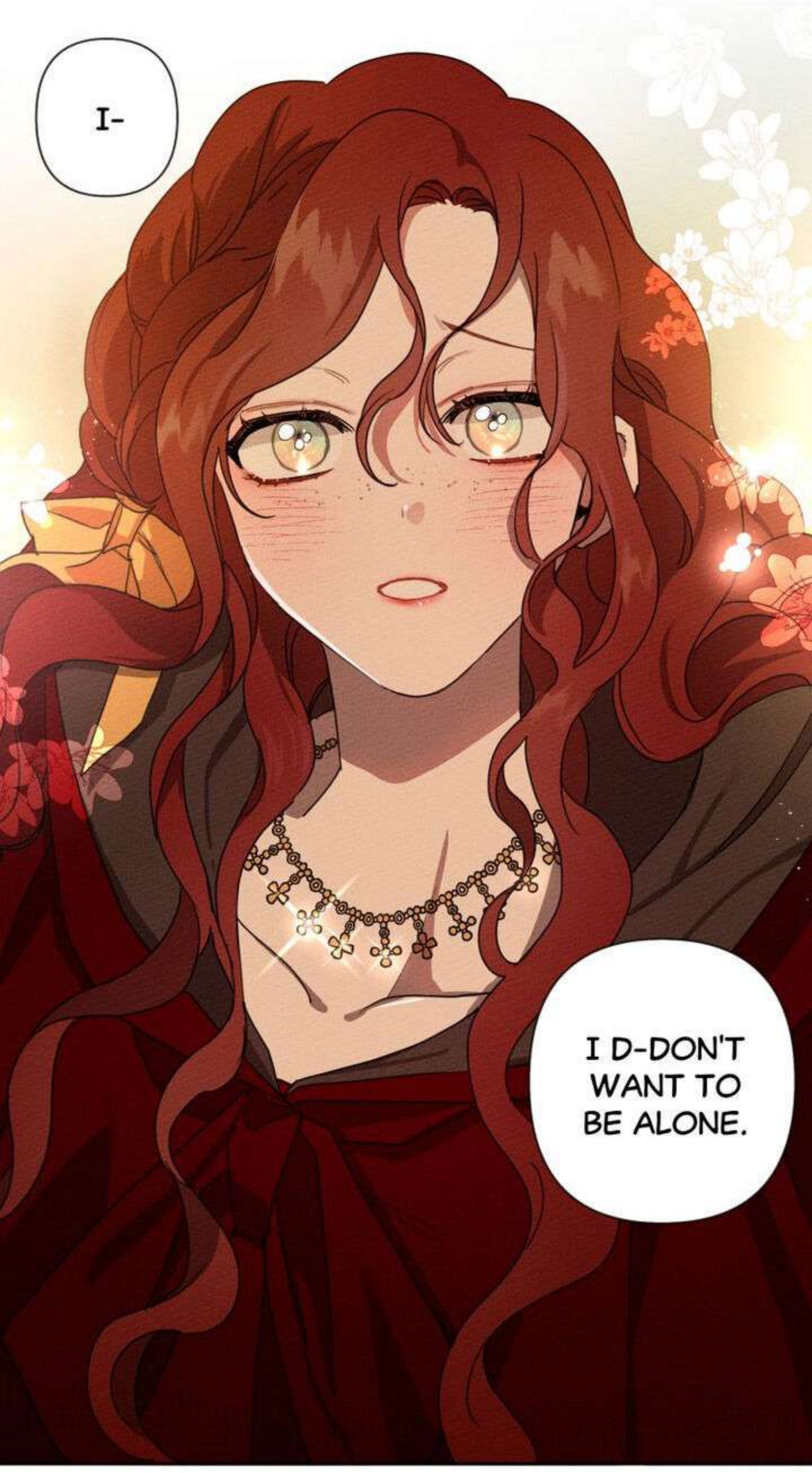

FLINCH


... YOU'RE RIGHT. WE SHOULDN'T GIVE THE DUKE ANYTHING TO USE AGAINST US.
JUST DON'T BLAME ME IF YOU RUN OUT OF MONEY.
GLOOMY.

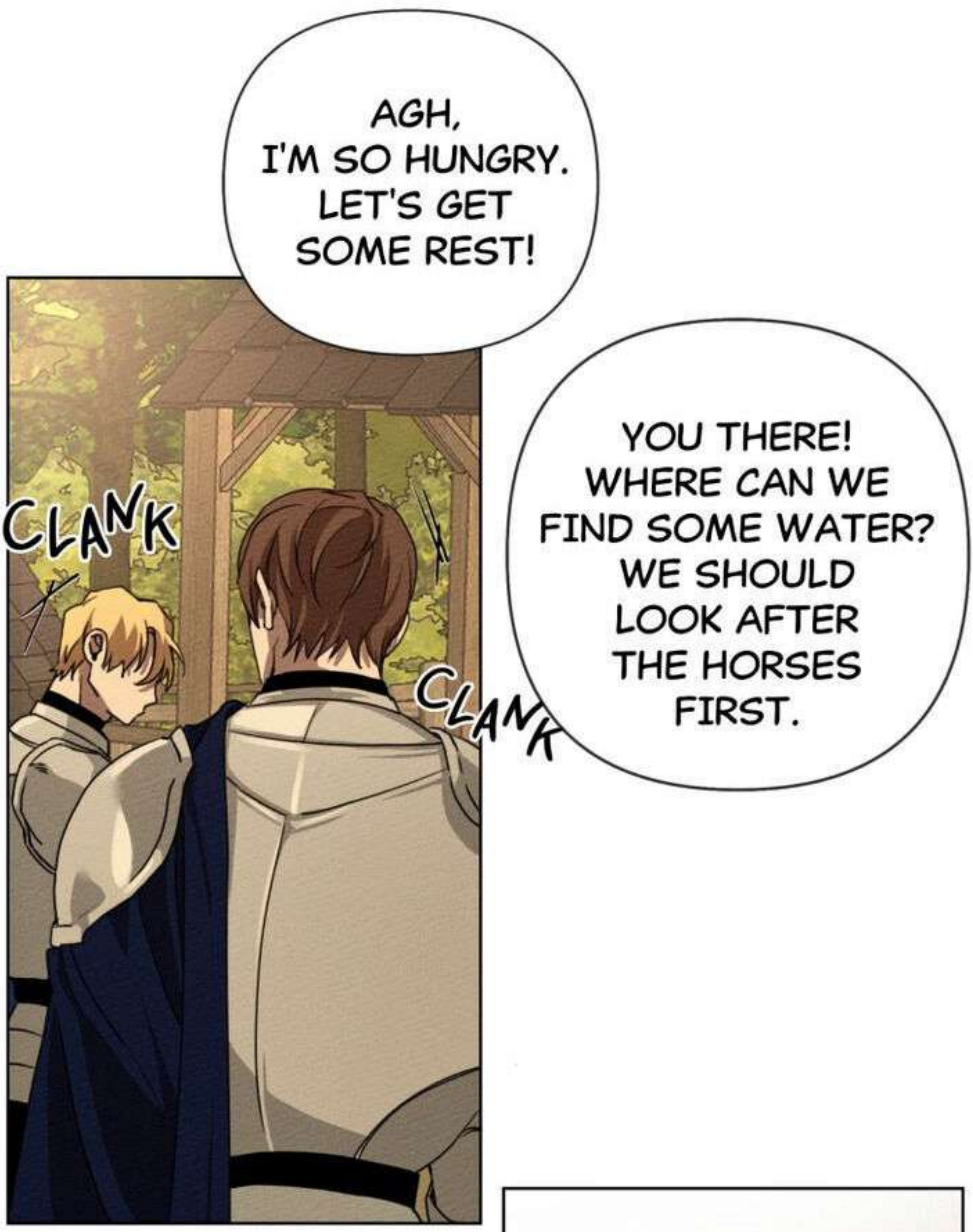
IT'S MY FAULT. THE VILLAGERS WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE COOPERATIVE IF I WERE ROSETTA.
AND THE LODGING?
APPARENTLY, THE COTTAGES ARE ALL OCCUPIED BY FARMERS HERE FOR THE HARVEST. I WAS BARELY ABLE TO SECURE ONE.
IF YOU CAN FIND ANOTHER COTTAGE FOR MY WIFE,
I DON'T WANT THEM DESPISING ME ANY MORE THAN THEY ALREADY DO!

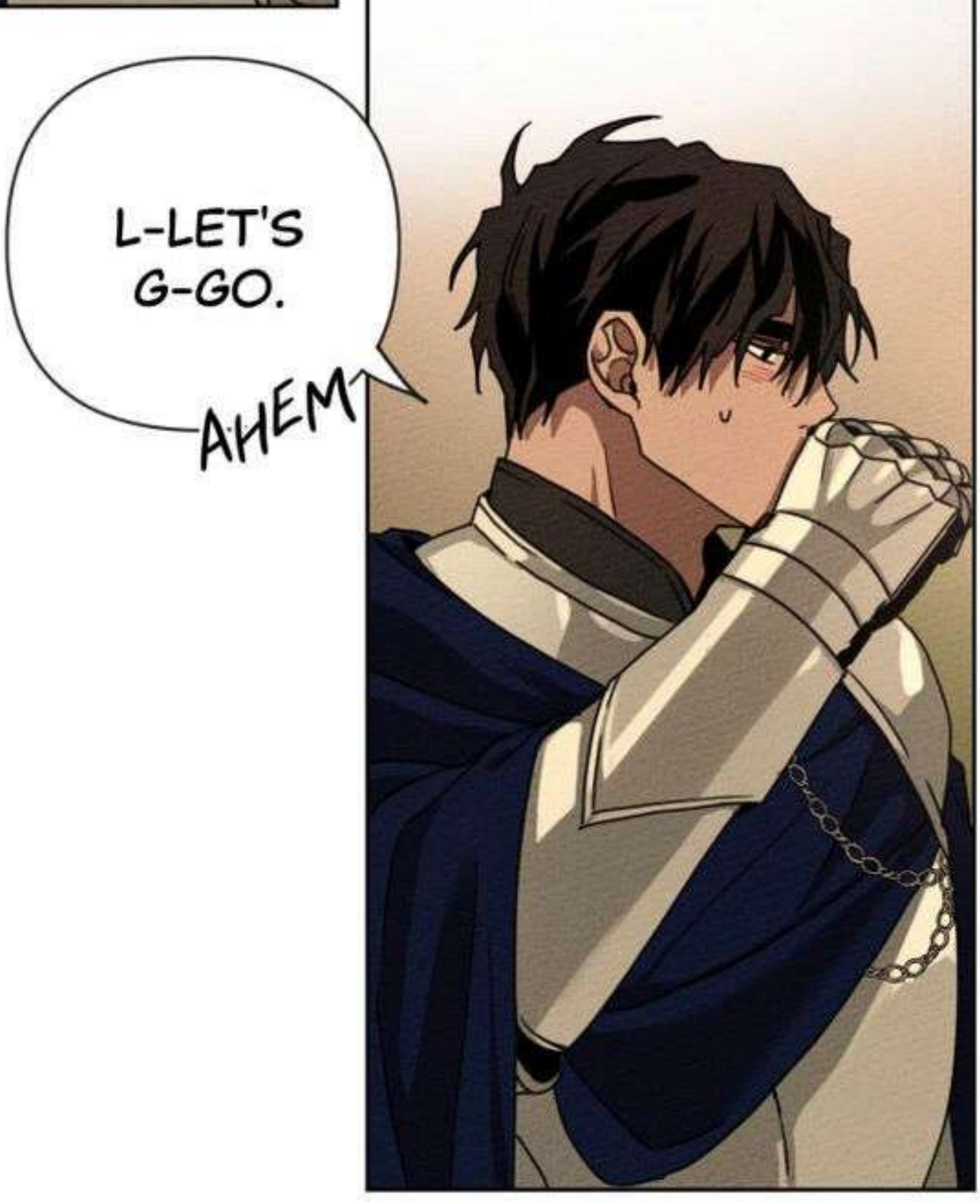

I WILL PAY YOU HANDSO—
HUH?

PULL

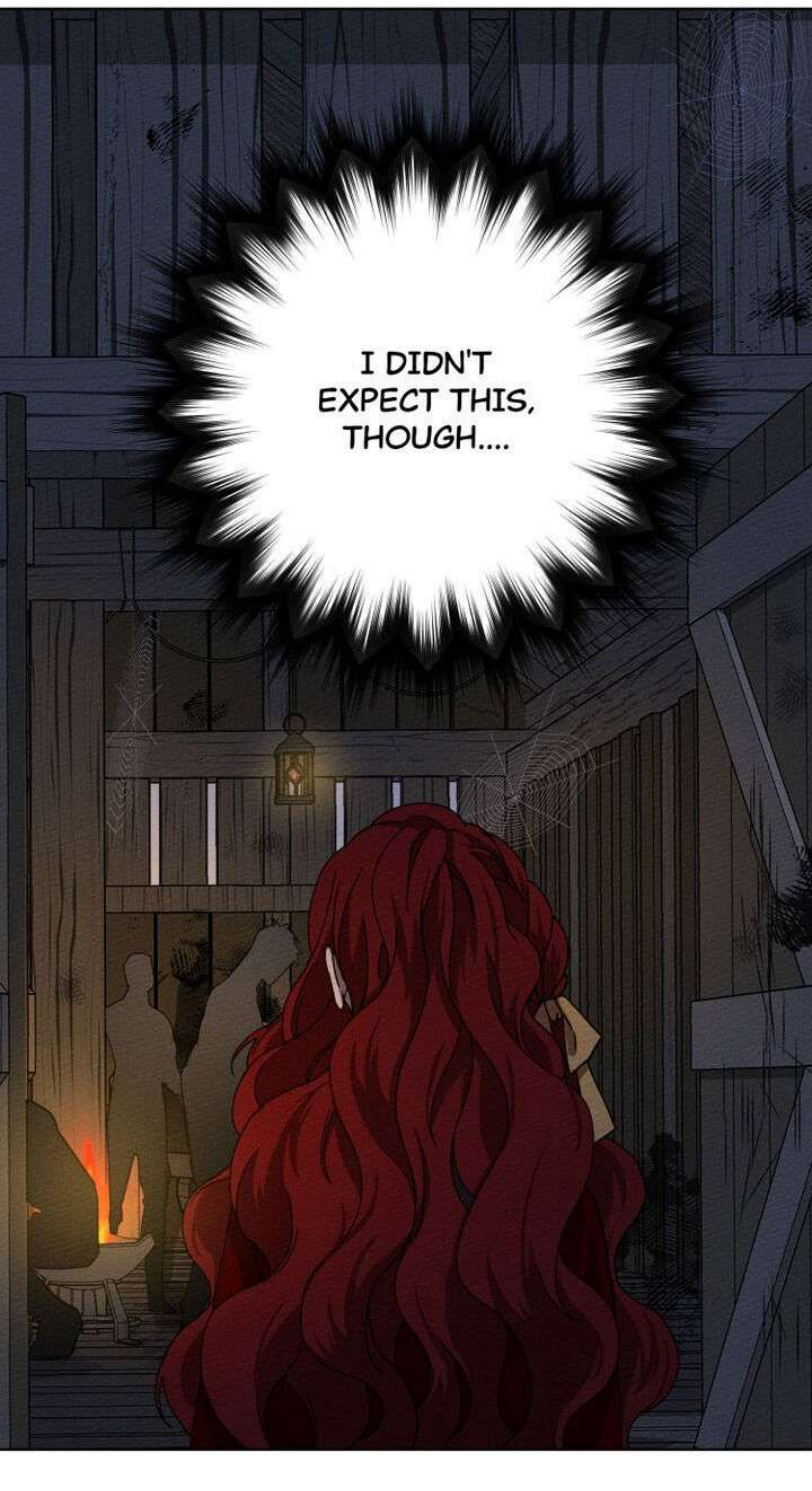

I-
I D-DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE.

. . . .


AGH, I'M SO HUNGRY. LET'S GET SOME REST!
CLANK
YOU THERE! WHERE CAN WE FIND SOME WATER? WE SHOULD LOOK AFTER THE HORSES FIRST.
CLANK

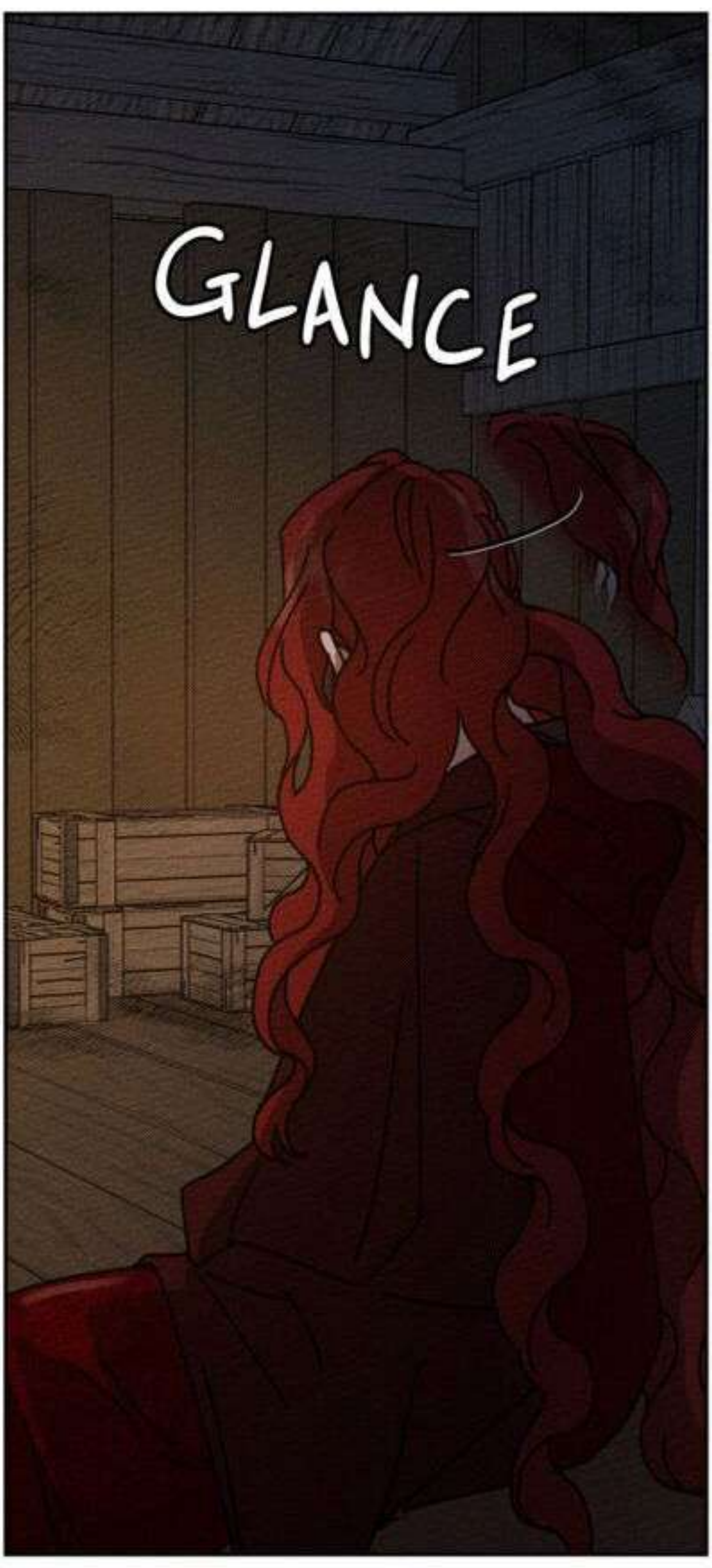

L-LET'S G-GO.
AHEM

I'M GLAD
HE LISTENED
TO MY REQUEST.

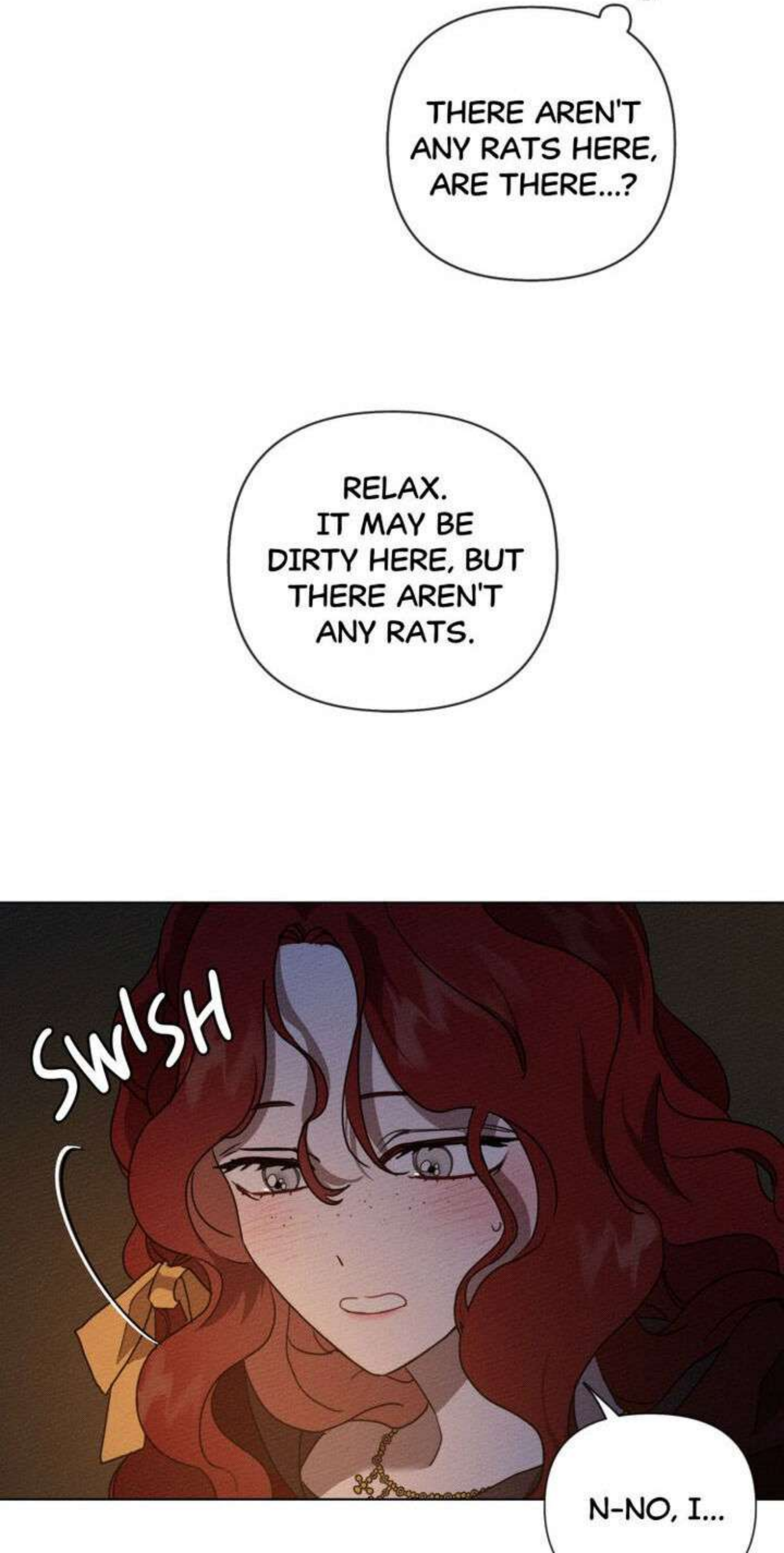

I DIDN'T EXPECT THIS, THOUGH....

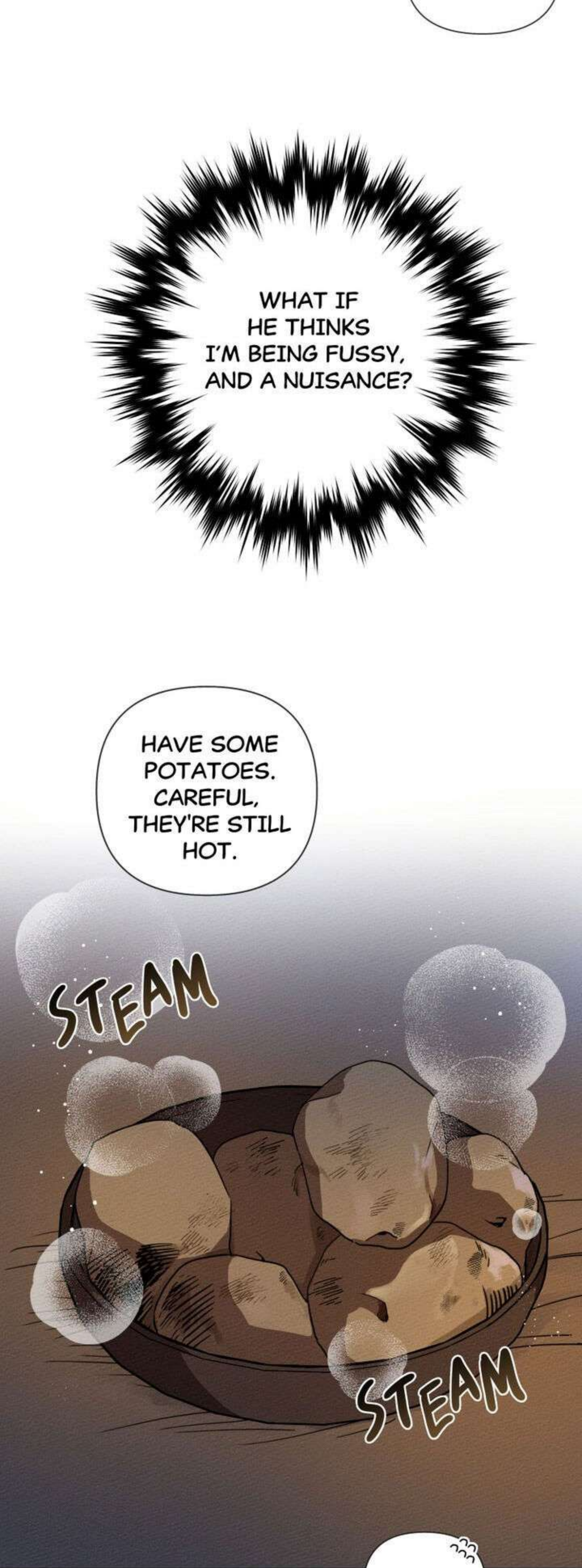
OVER HERE.

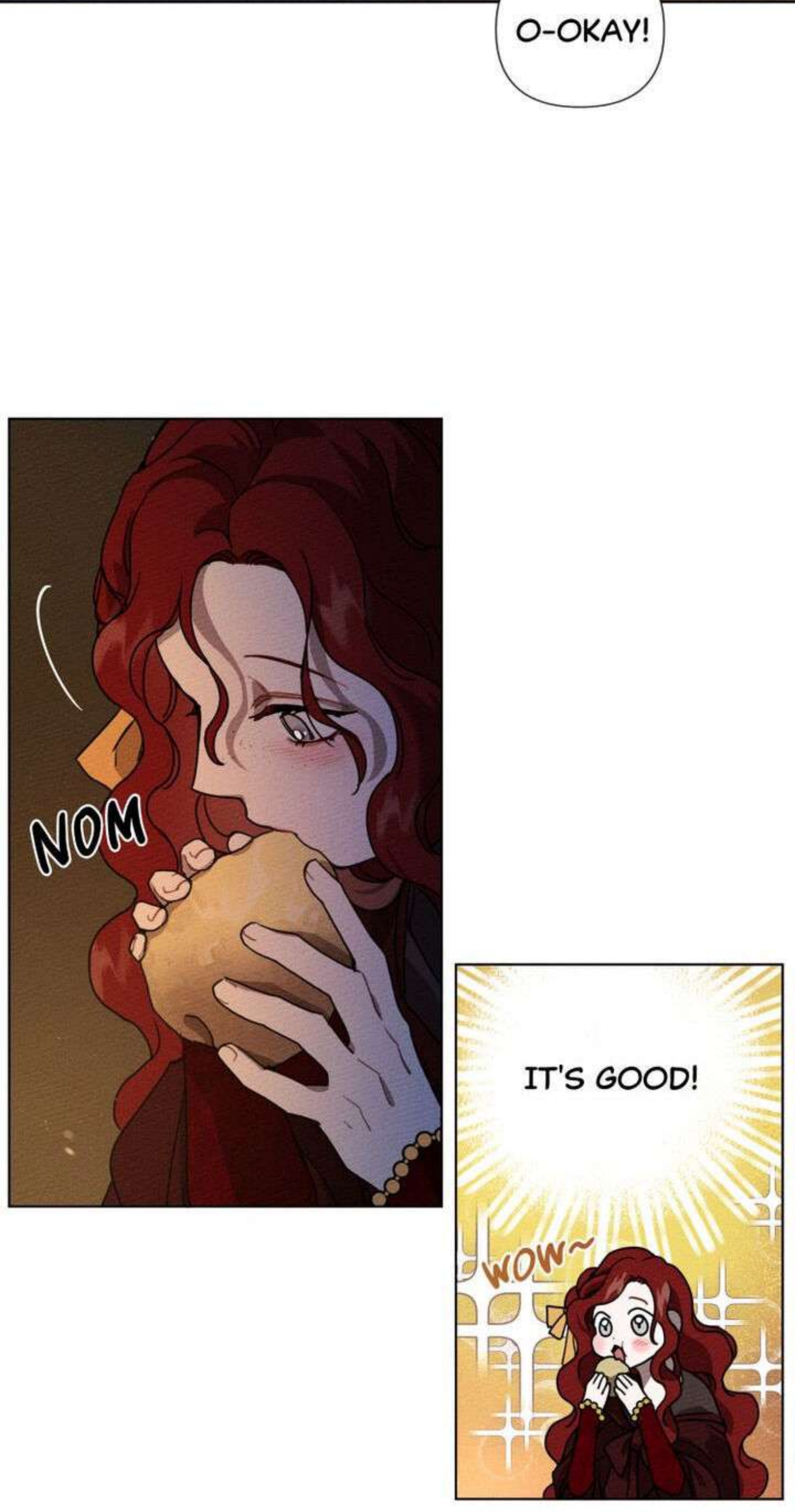
CRACKLE
CRACKLE

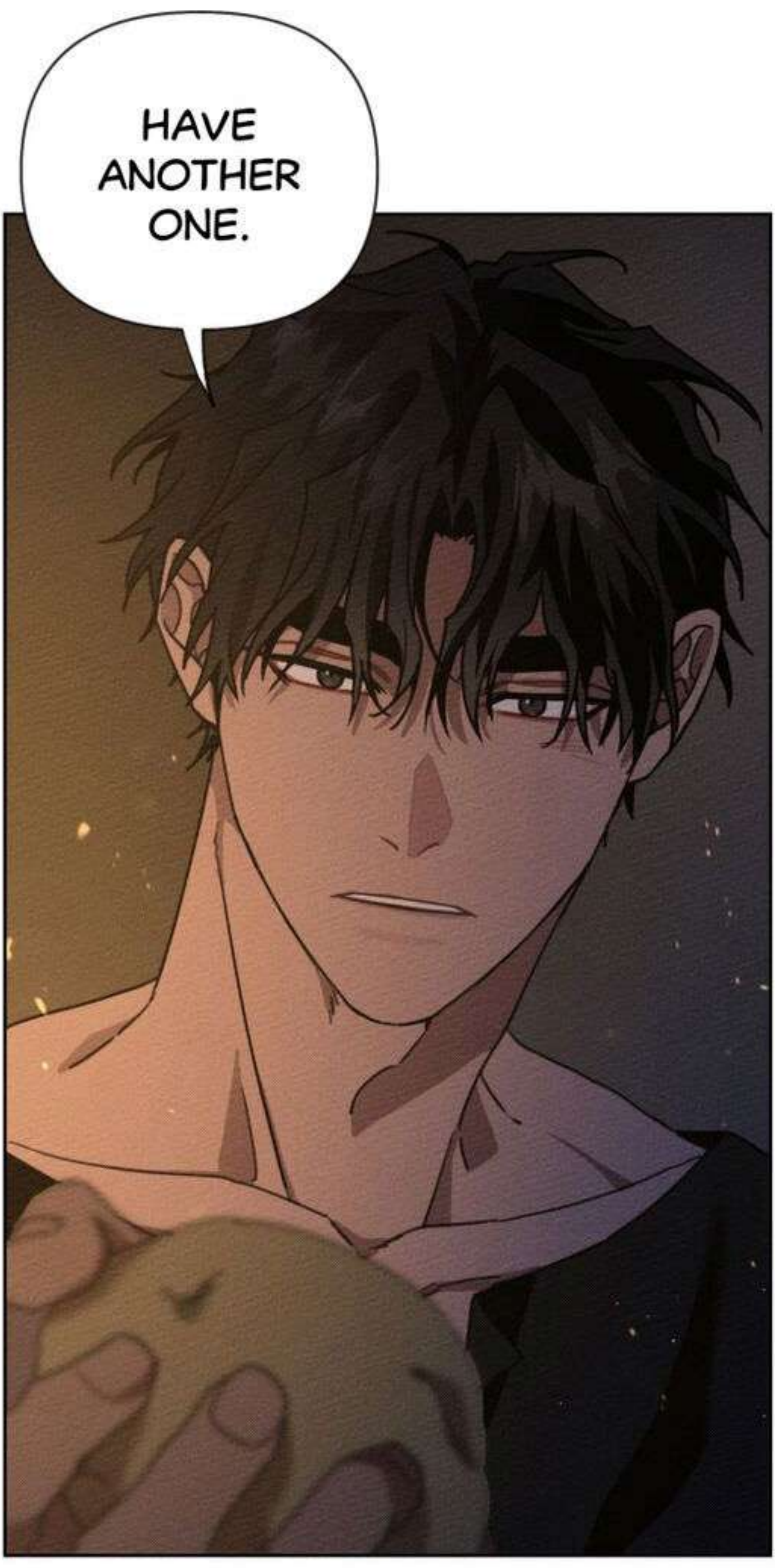

GLANCE

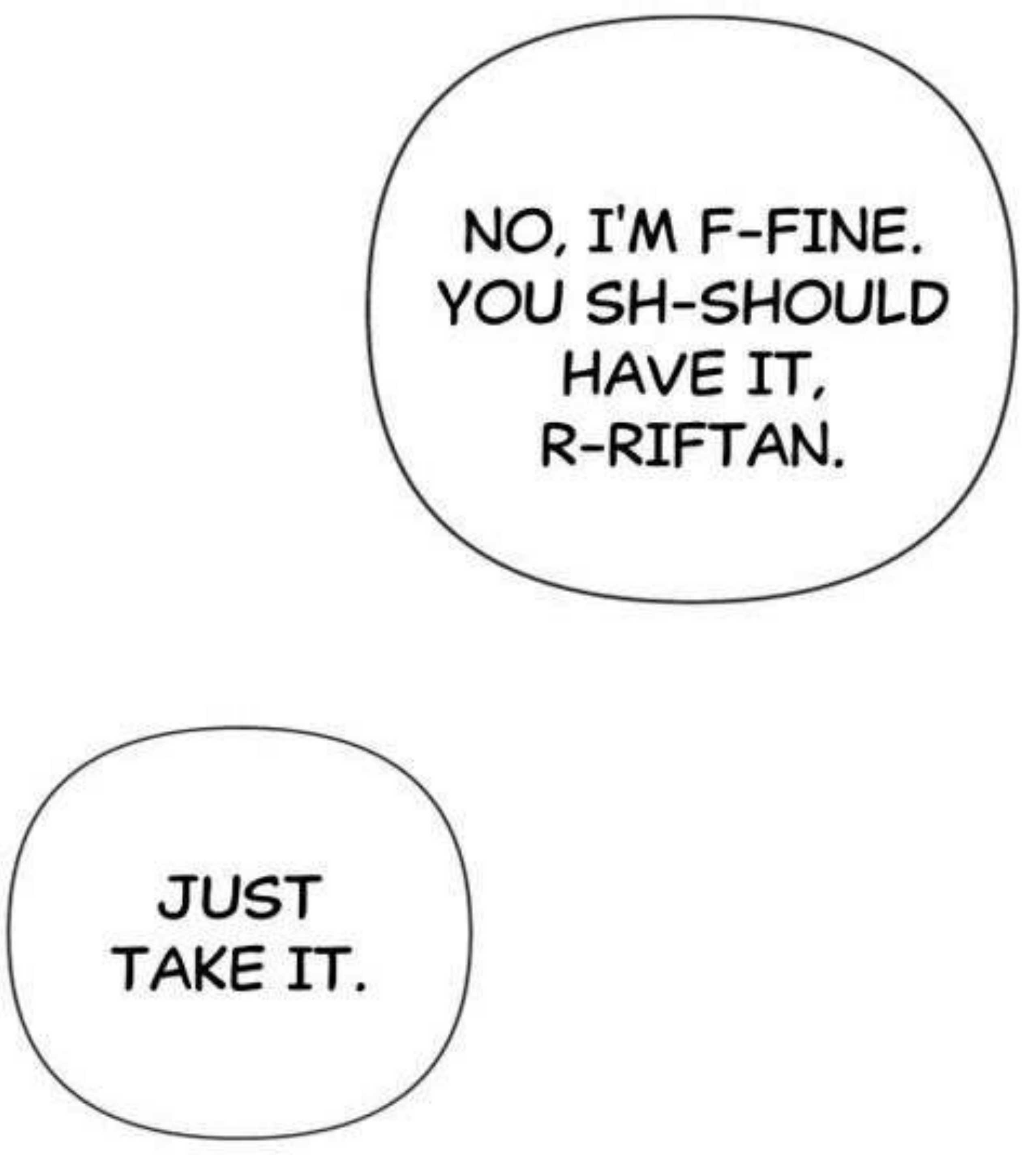
THERE AREN'T ANY RATS HERE, ARE THERE...?
RELAX. IT MAY BE DIRTY HERE, BUT THERE AREN'T ANY RATS.

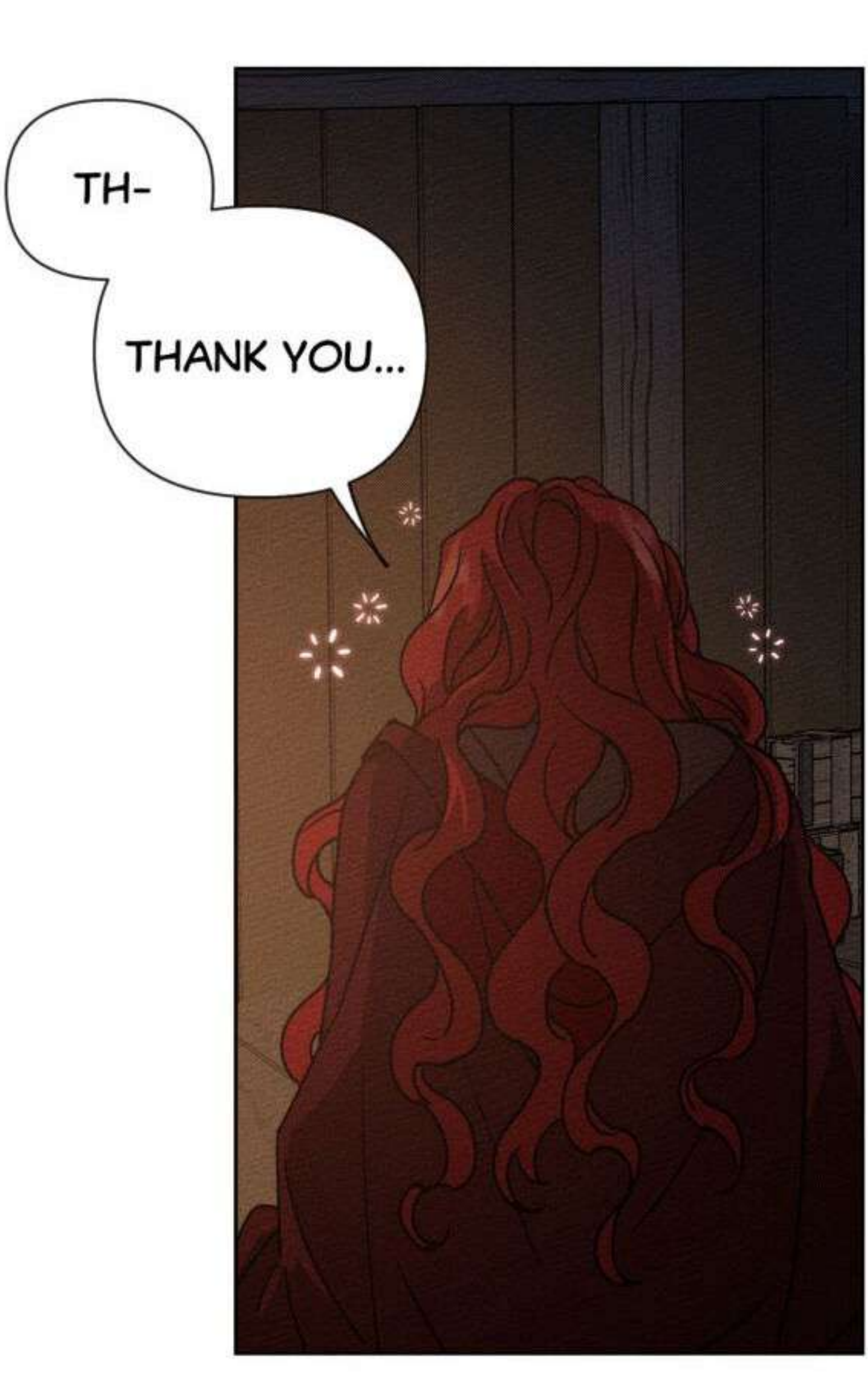

SWISH
N-NO, I...


WHAT IF HE THINKS I'M BEING FUSSY, AND A NUISANCE?
HAVE SOME POTATOES. CAREFUL, THEY'RE STILL HOT.
STEAM
STEAM

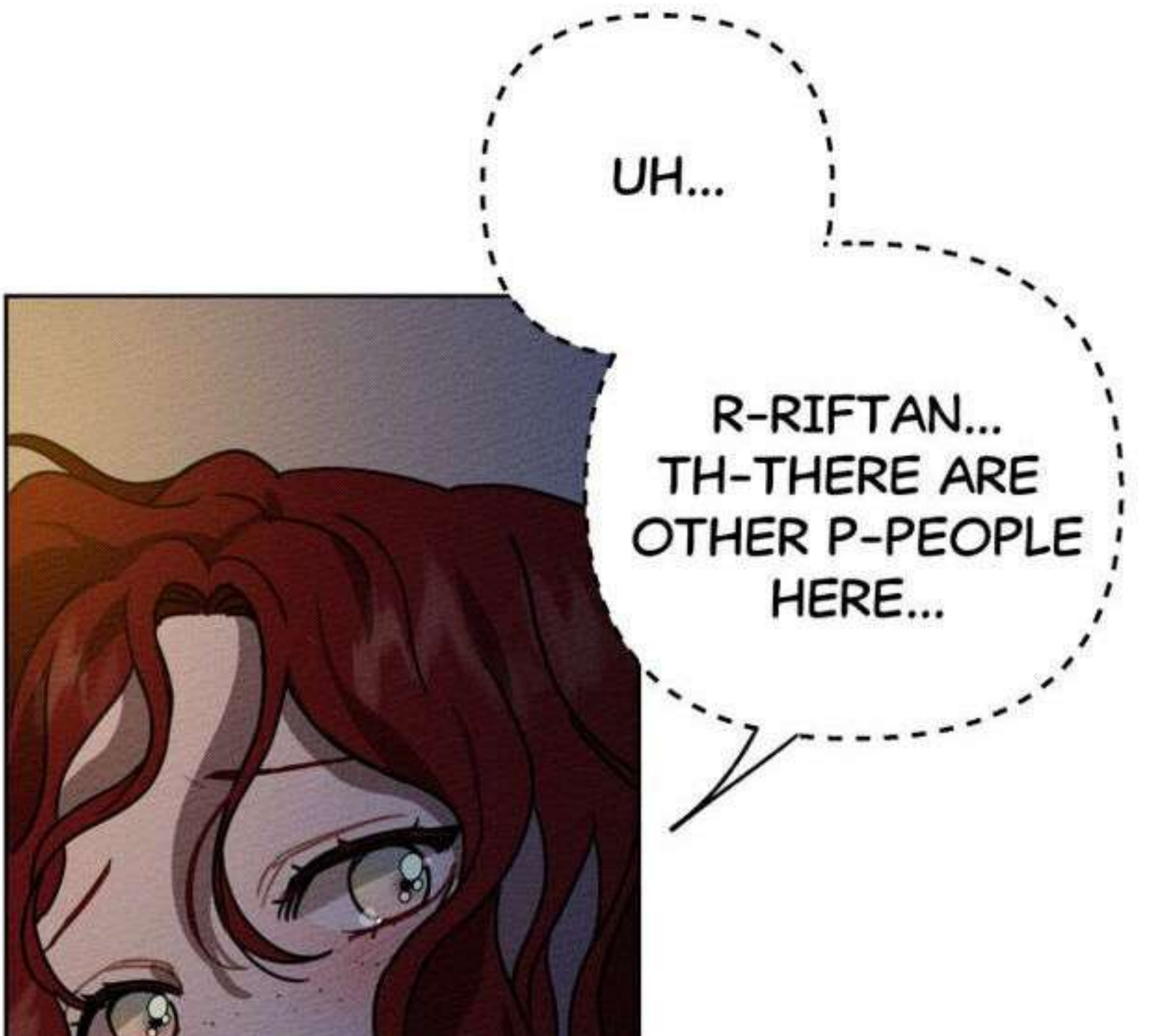

O-OKAY!
NOM
IT'S GOOD!
WOW~

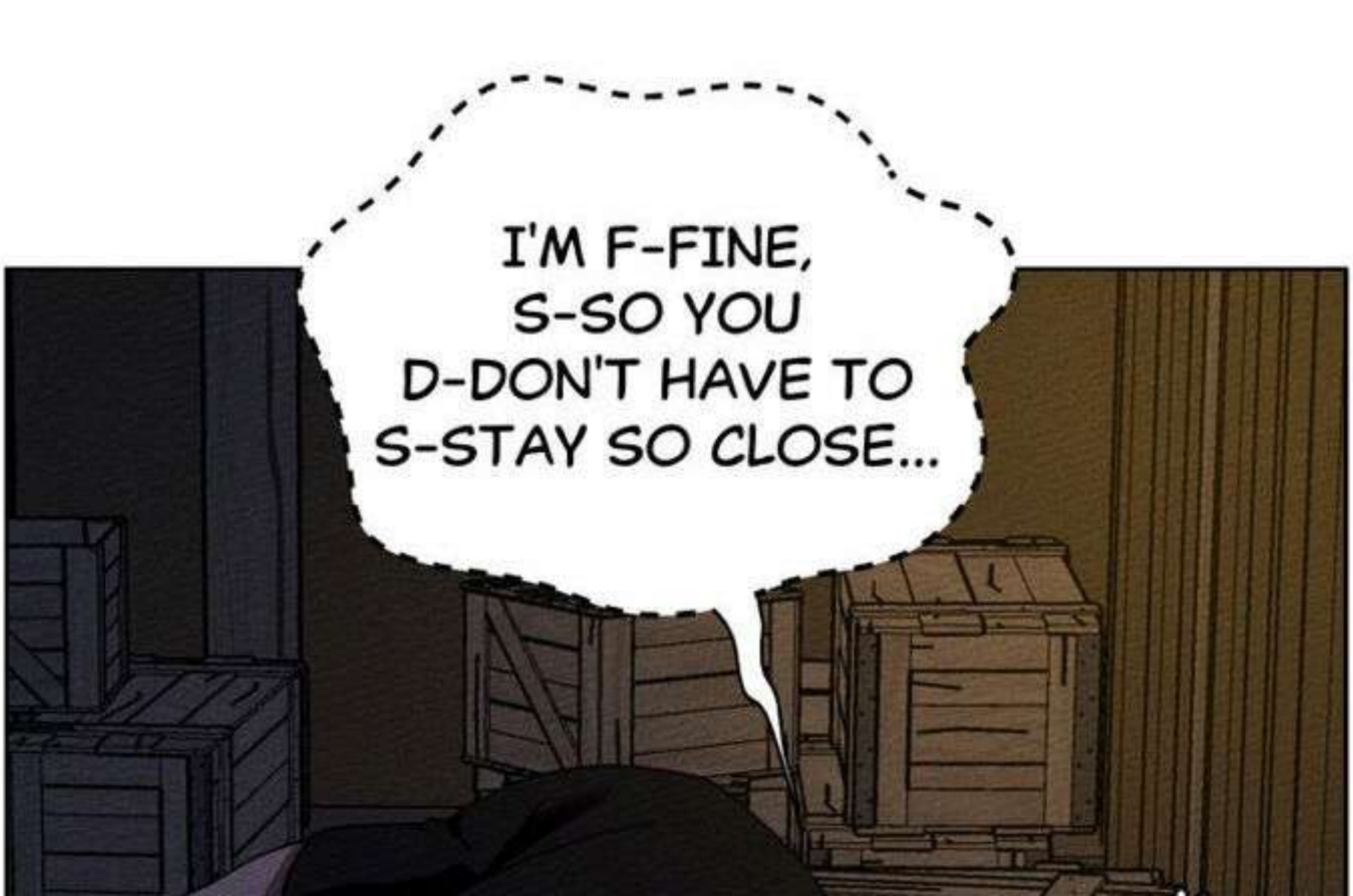

HAVE ANOTHER ONE.

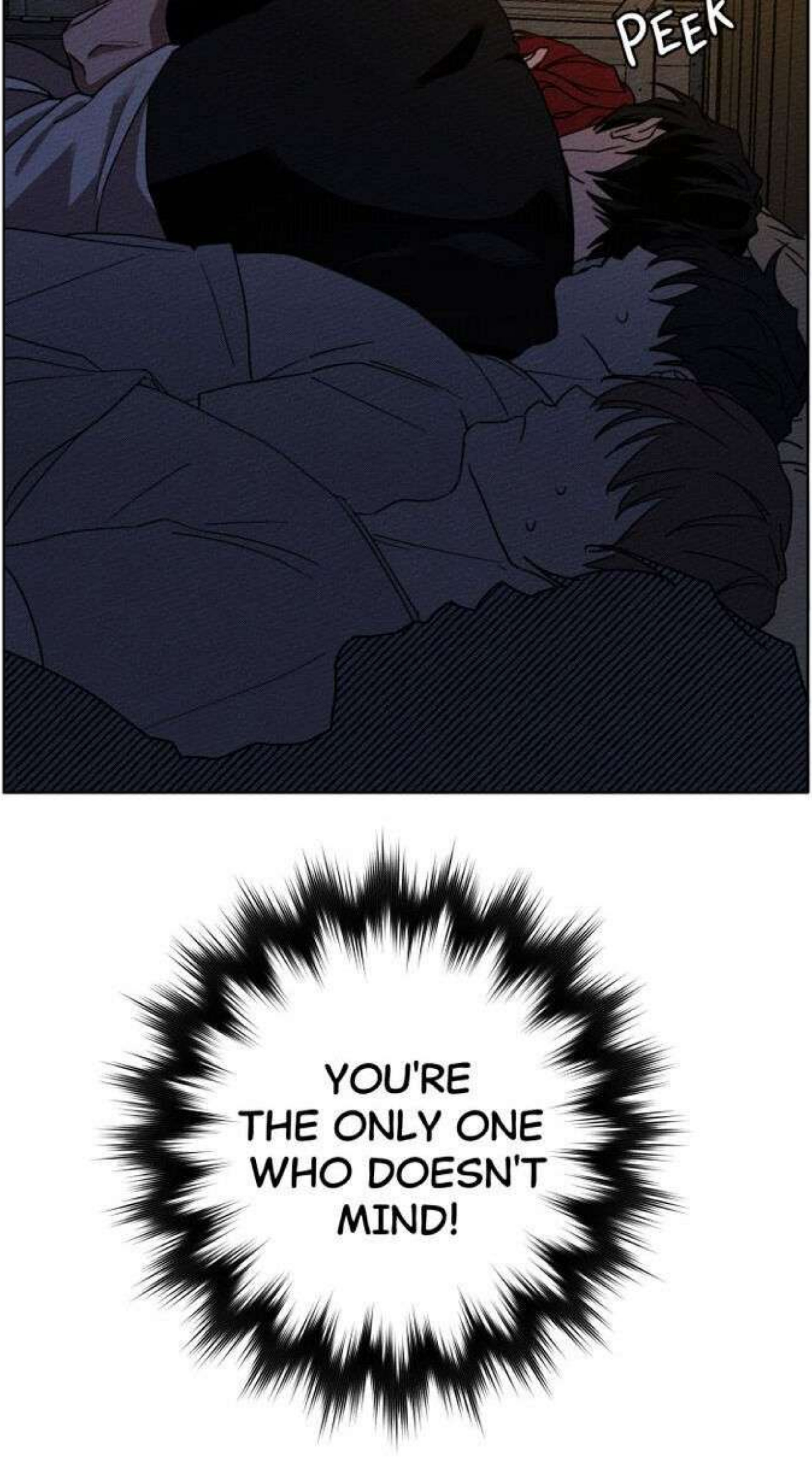

NO, I'M F-FINE. YOU SH-SHOULD HAVE IT, R-RIFTAN.
JUST TAKE IT.


TH-
THANK YOU...

NO ONE'S EVER BOTHERED TO OFFER ME MORE FOOD.
IT TASTES BETTER THAN ANYTHING I'VE EVER HAD AT THE CROYSO CASTLE.


UH...
R-RIFTAN... TH-THERE ARE OTHER P-PEOPLE HERE...
NOBODY MINDS, SO STAY STILL. IT'S COLD.


I'M F-FINE, S-SO YOU D-DON'T HAVE TO S-STAY SO CLOSE...

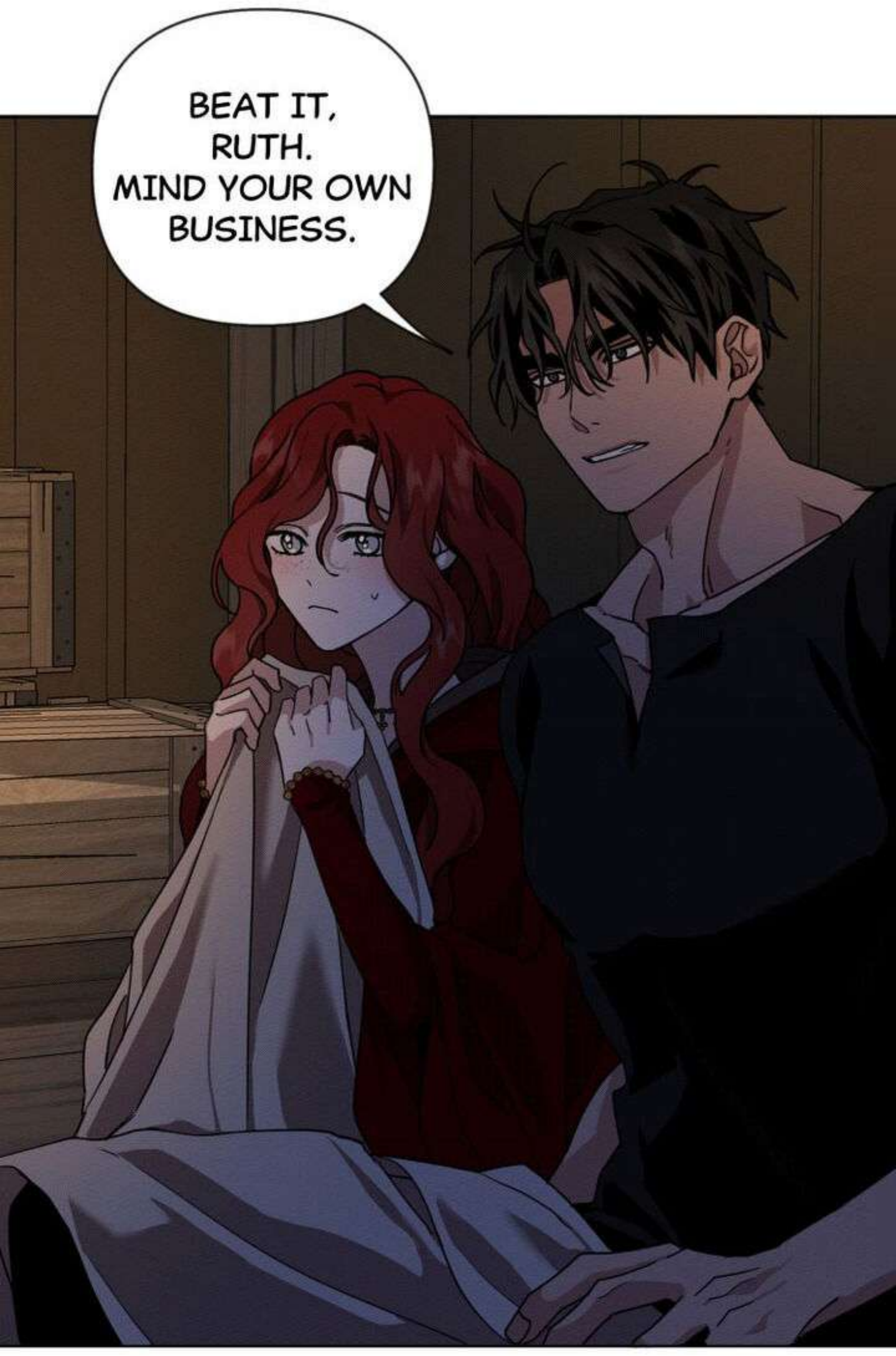

PEEK
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO DOESN'T MIND!

JEEZ,
CAN'T YOU SEE SHE'S EMBARRASSED? YOU SHOULD REALLY BE MORE CONSIDERATE!

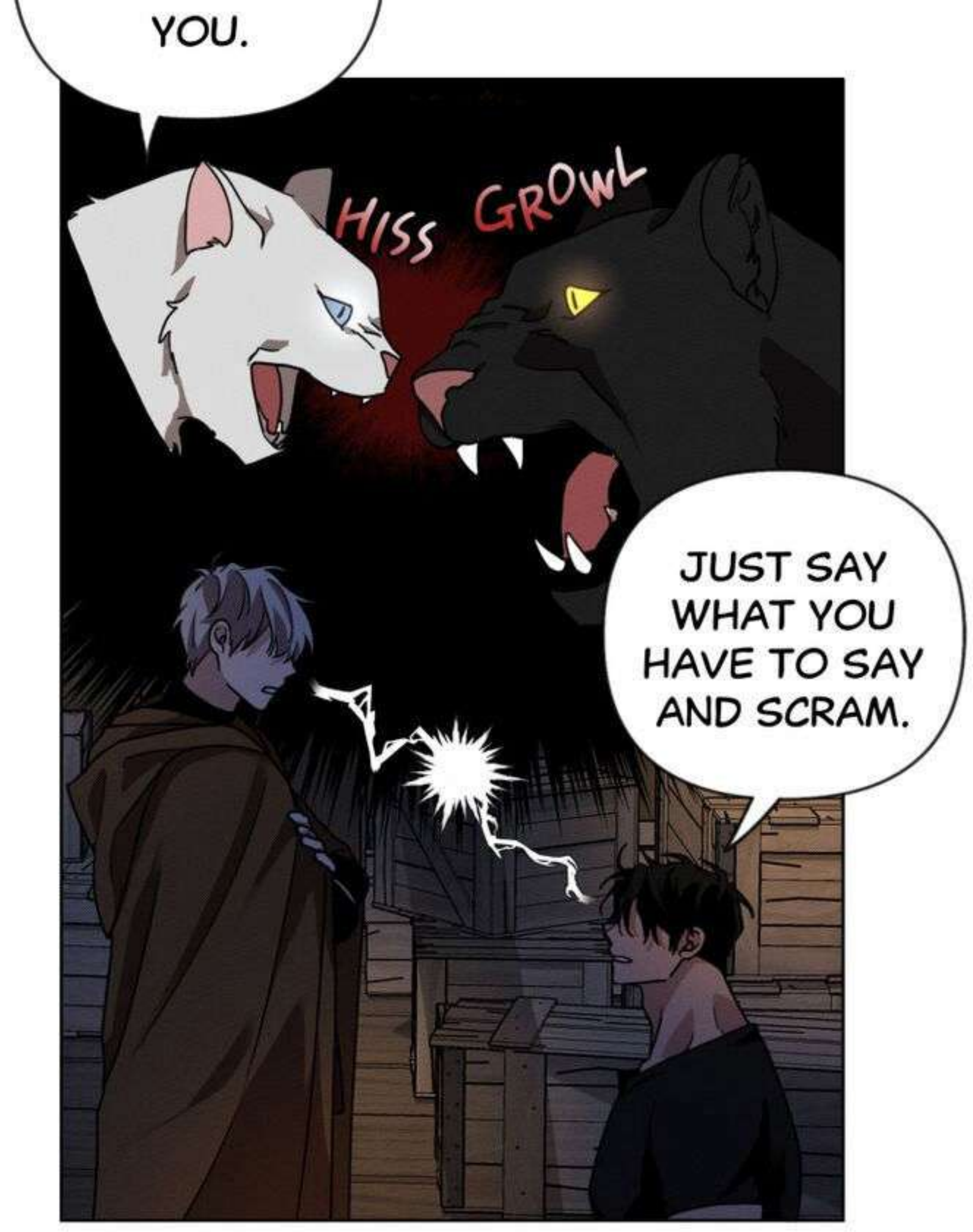
Under the Oak Tree

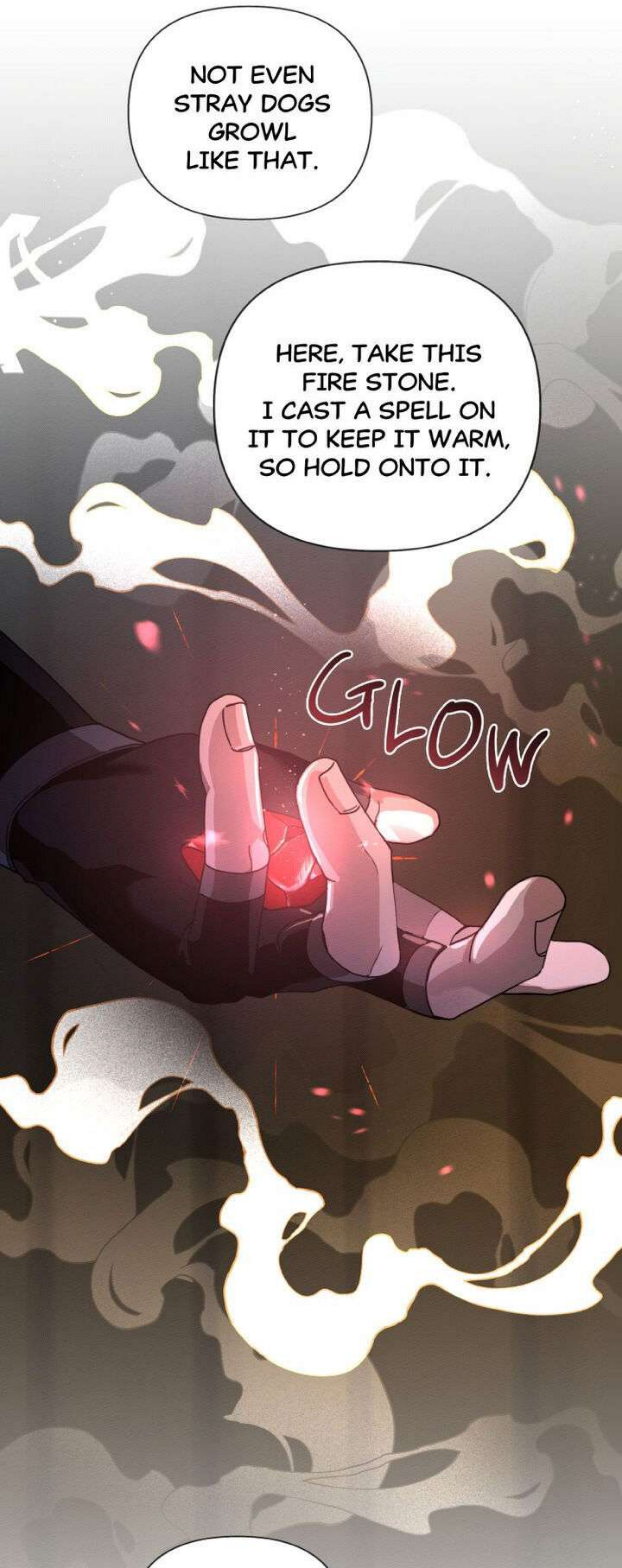
ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

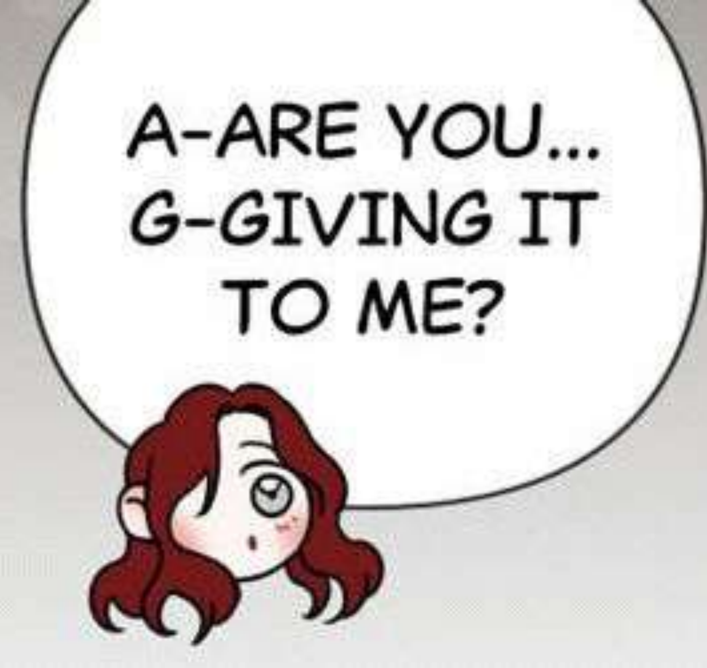
7


BEAT IT, RUTH. MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS.

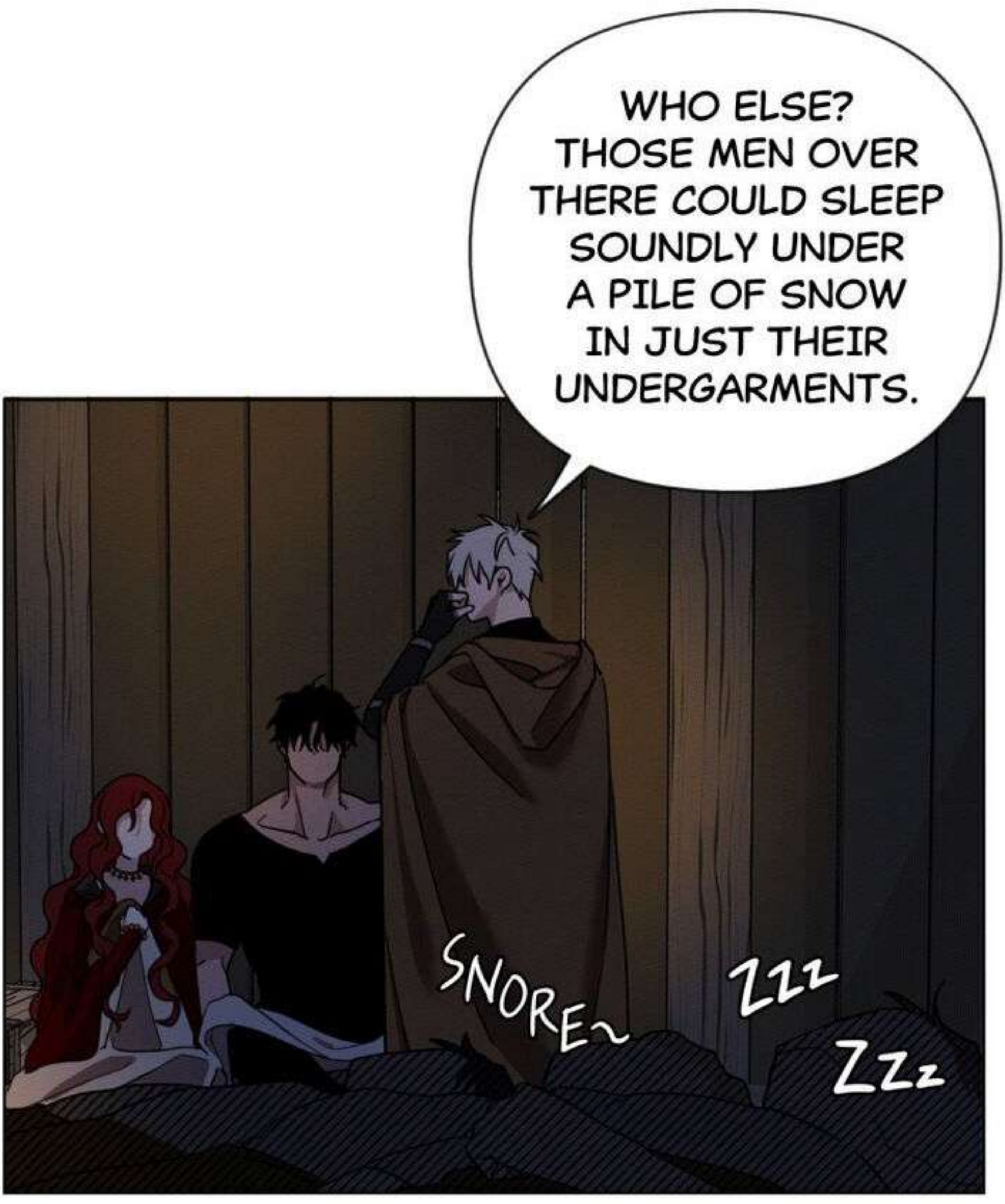
RELAX, I'M NOT HERE TO BOTHER

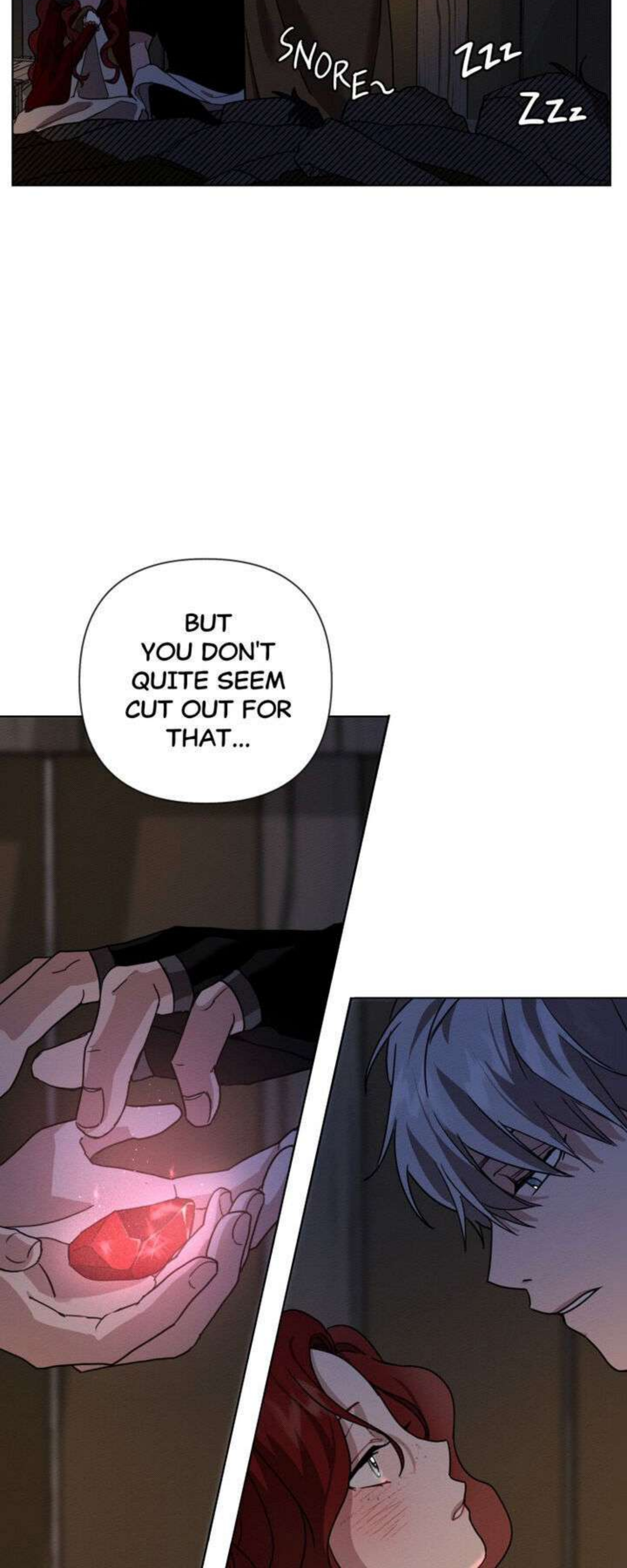

YOU.
HISS GROWL
JUST SAY WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY AND SCRAM.

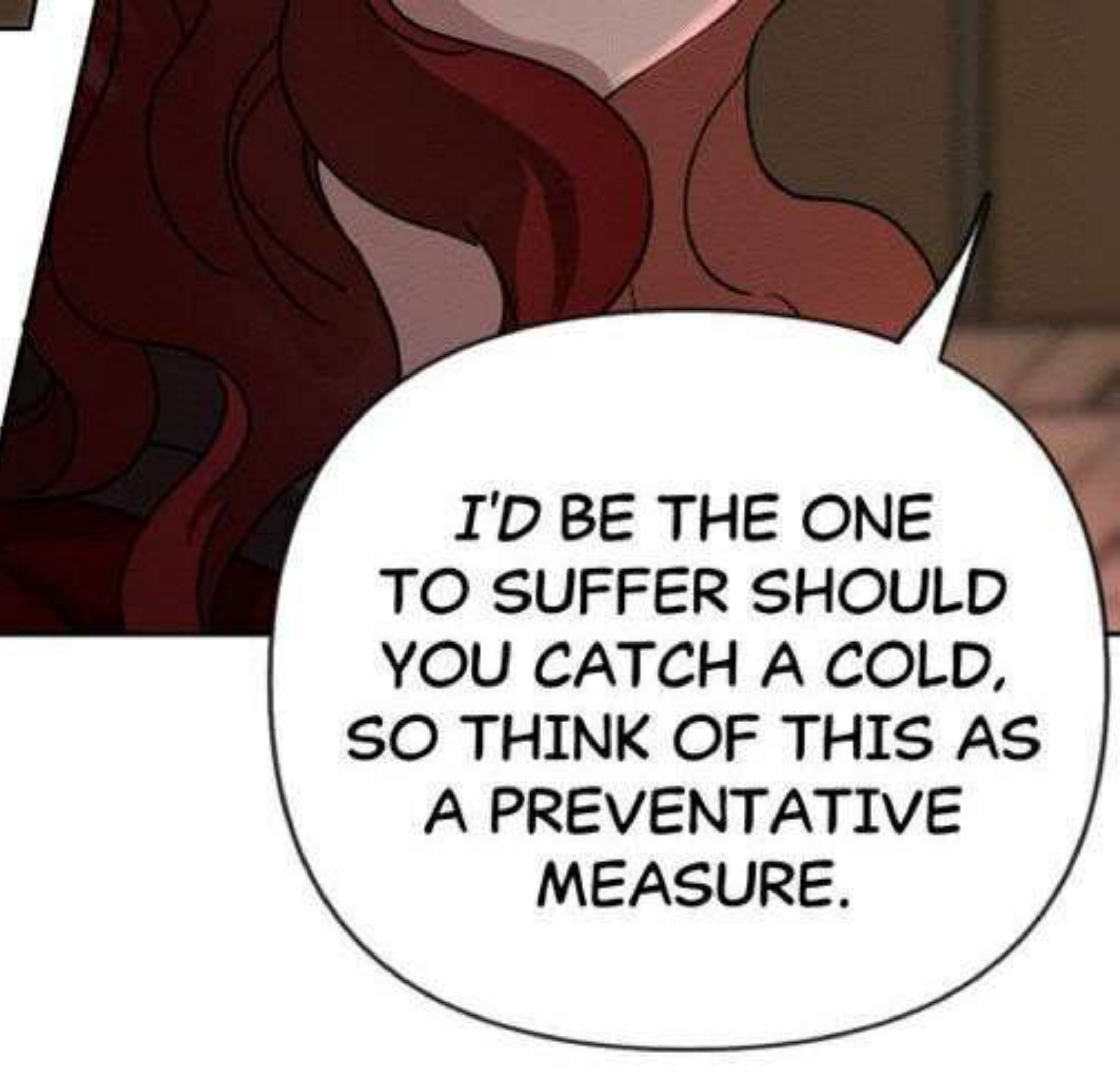

NOT EVEN STRAY DOGS GROWL LIKE THAT.
HERE, TAKE THIS FIRE STONE. I CAST A SPELL ON IT TO KEEP IT WARM, SO HOLD ONTO IT.
GLOW

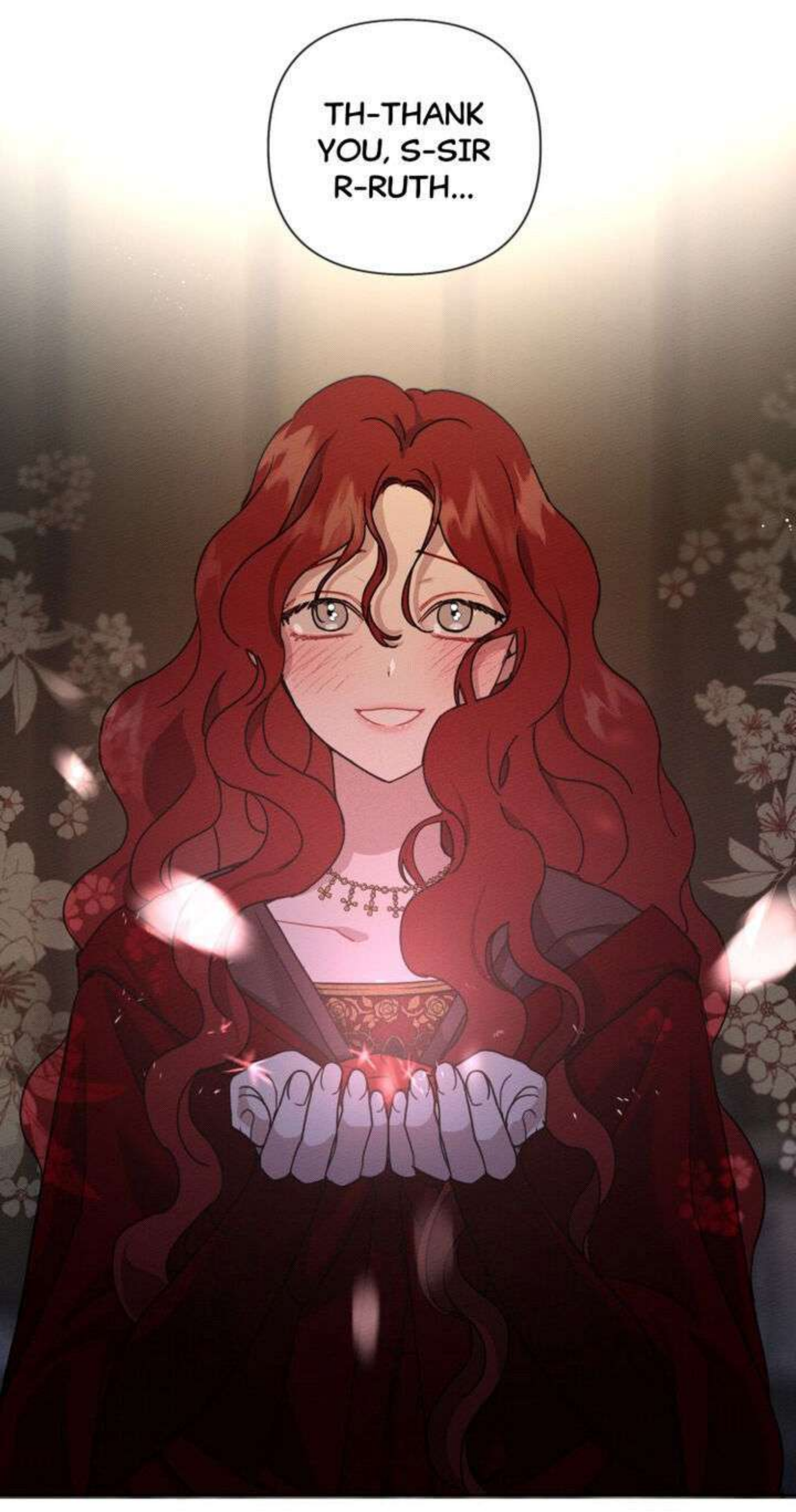

A-ARE YOU... G-GIVING IT TO ME?

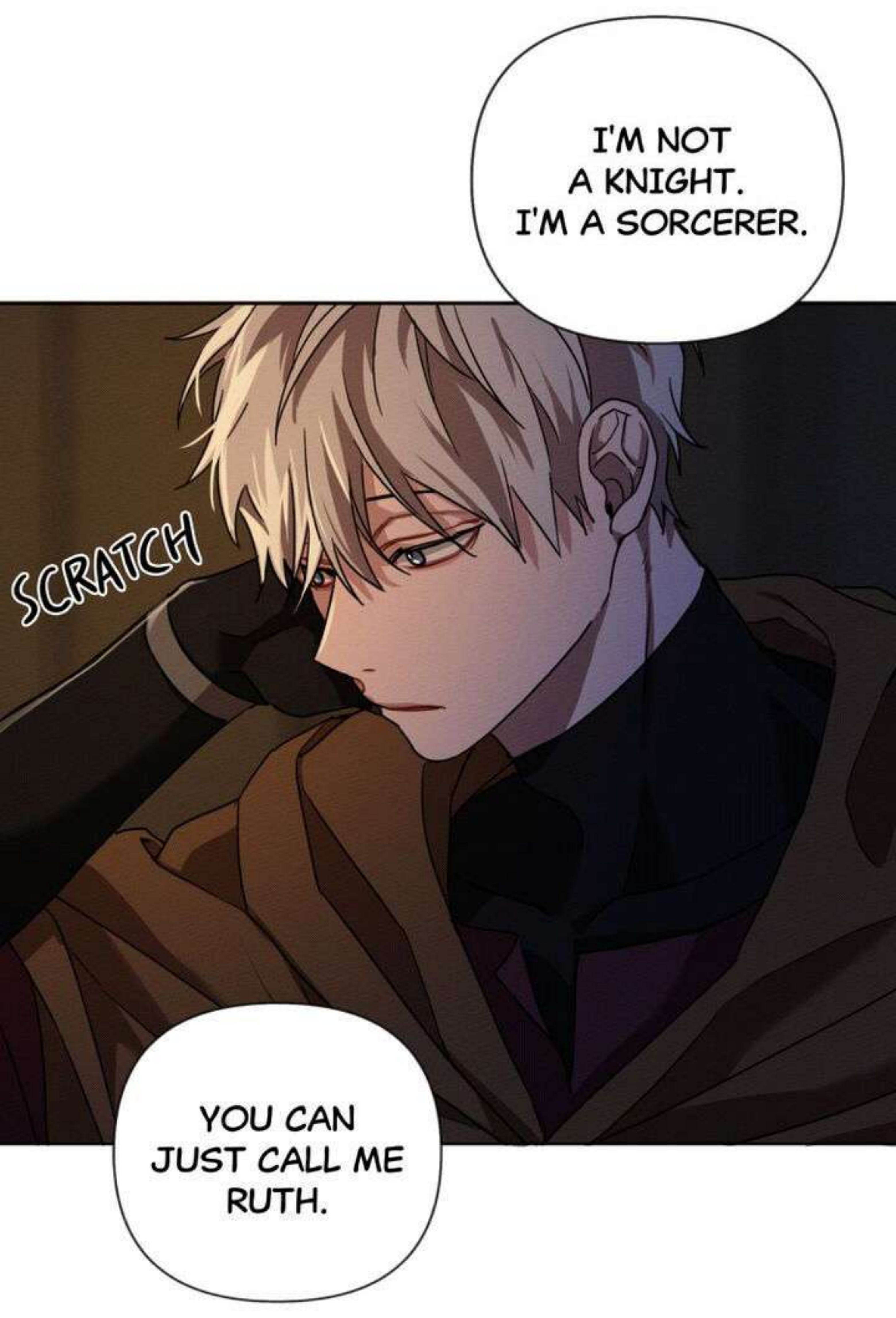
TSK.

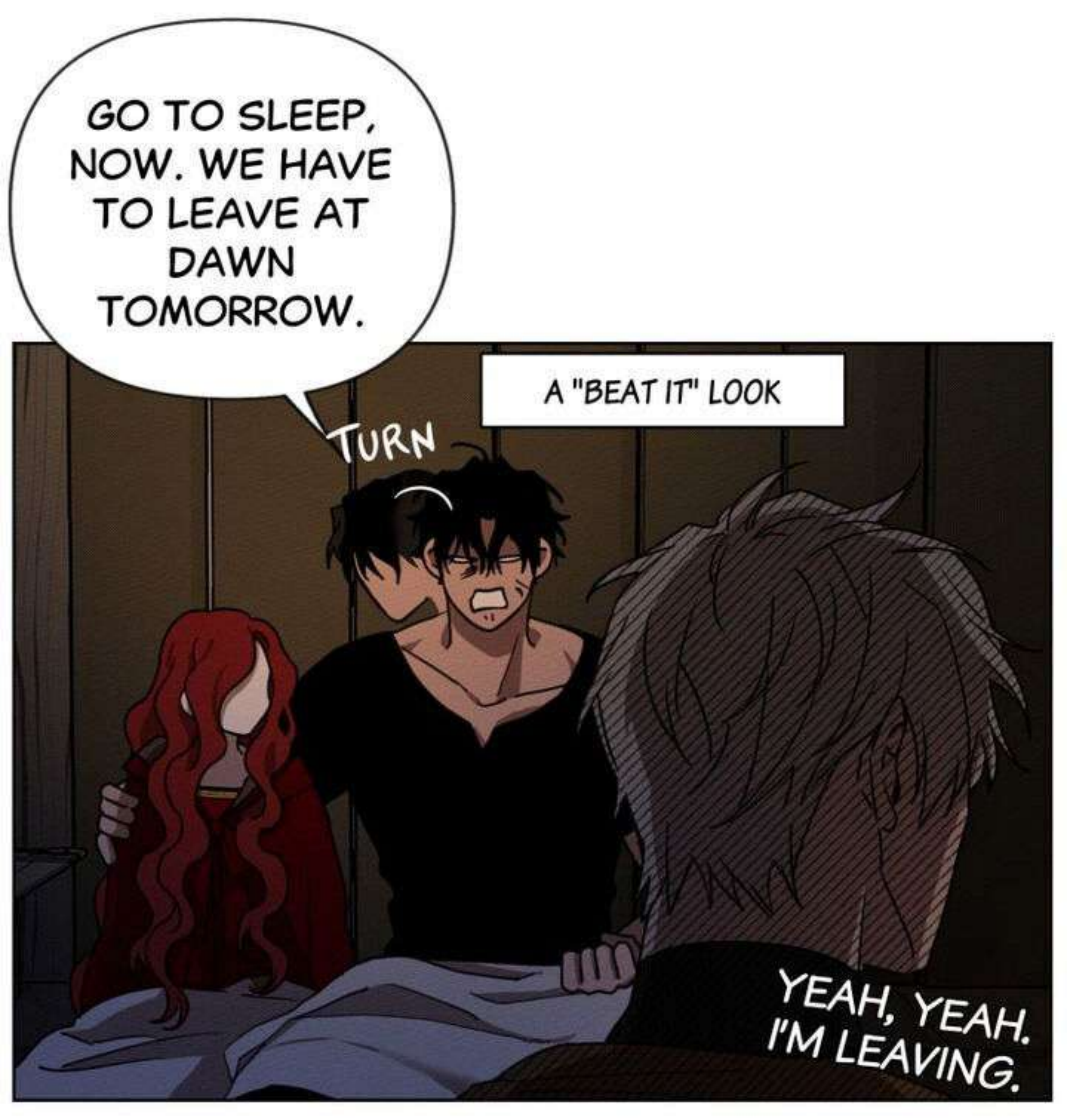

WHO ELSE? THOSE MEN OVER THERE COULD SLEEP SOUNDLY UNDER A PILE OF SNOW IN JUST THEIR UNDERGARMENTS.
SNORE~
ZZZ
ZZz

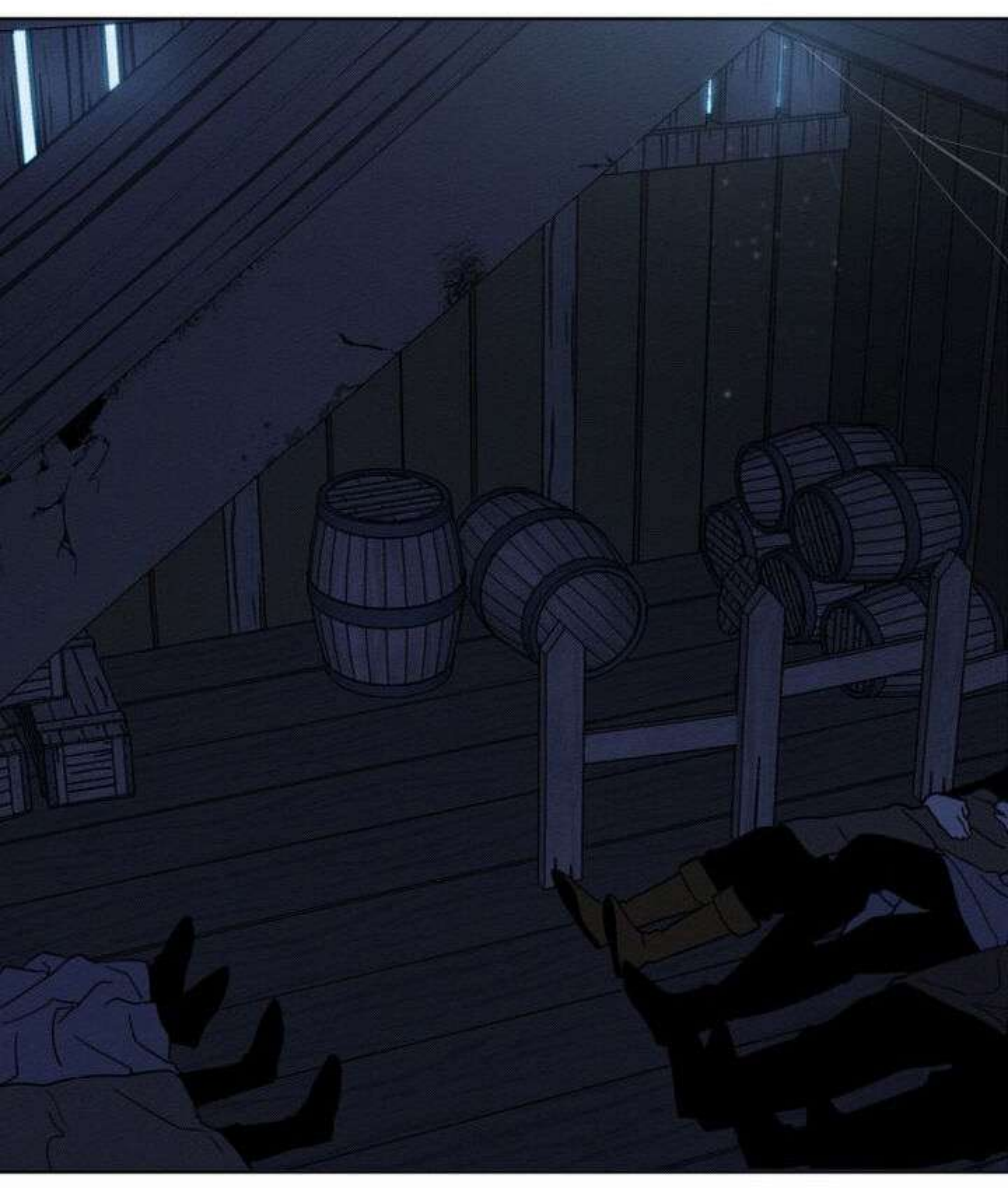

BUT YOU DON'T QUITE SEEM CUT OUT FOR THAT...


I'D BE THE ONE TO SUFFER SHOULD YOU CATCH A COLD, SO THINK OF THIS AS A PREVENTATIVE MEASURE.


TH-THANK YOU, S-SIR R-RUTH...

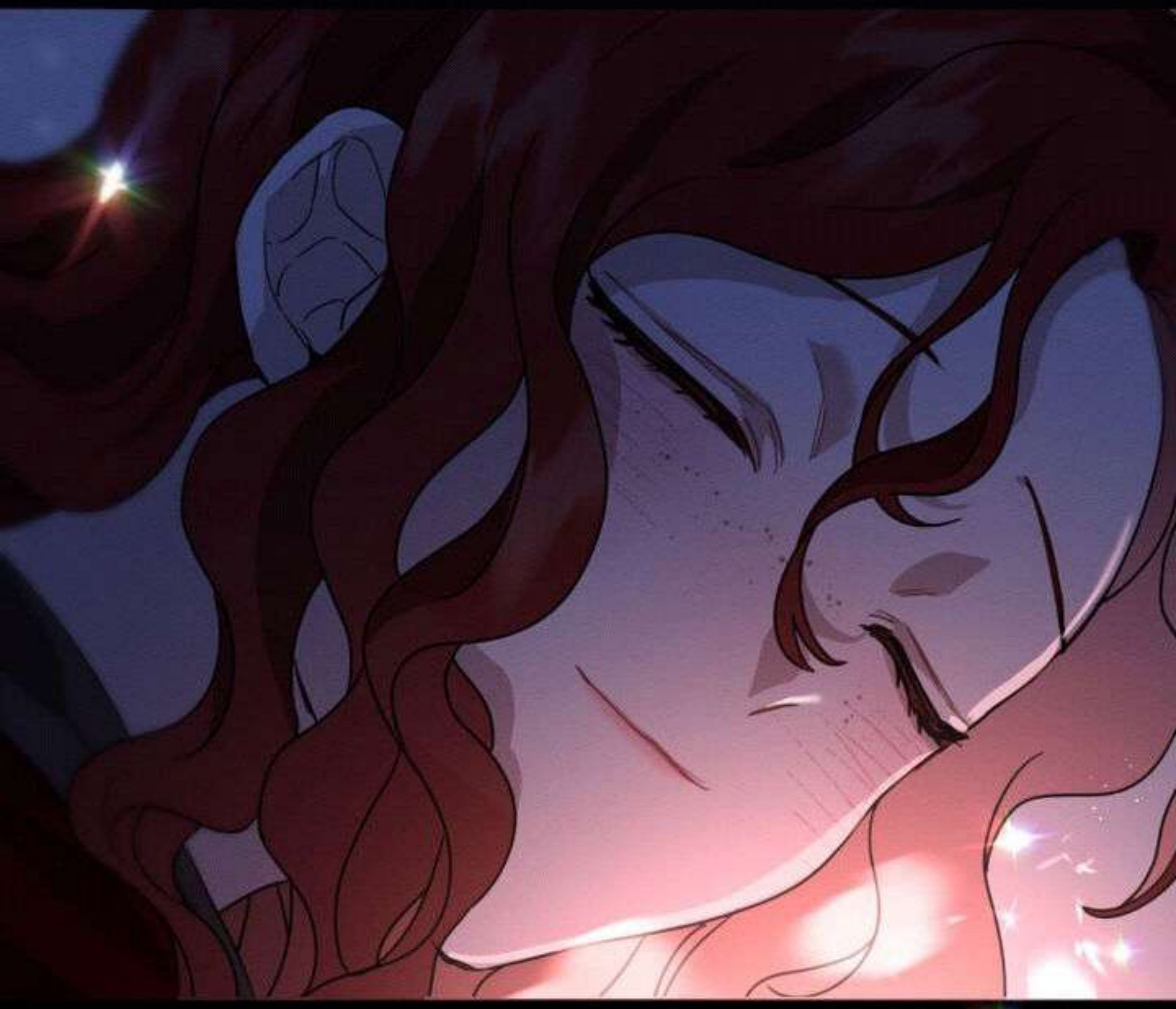

I'M NOT A KNIGHT. I'M A SORCERER.
SCRATCH
YOU CAN JUST CALL ME RUTH.


GO TO SLEEP, NOW. WE HAVE TO LEAVE AT DAWN TOMORROW.
TURN
A "BEAT IT" LOOK
YEAH, YEAH. I'M LEAVING.



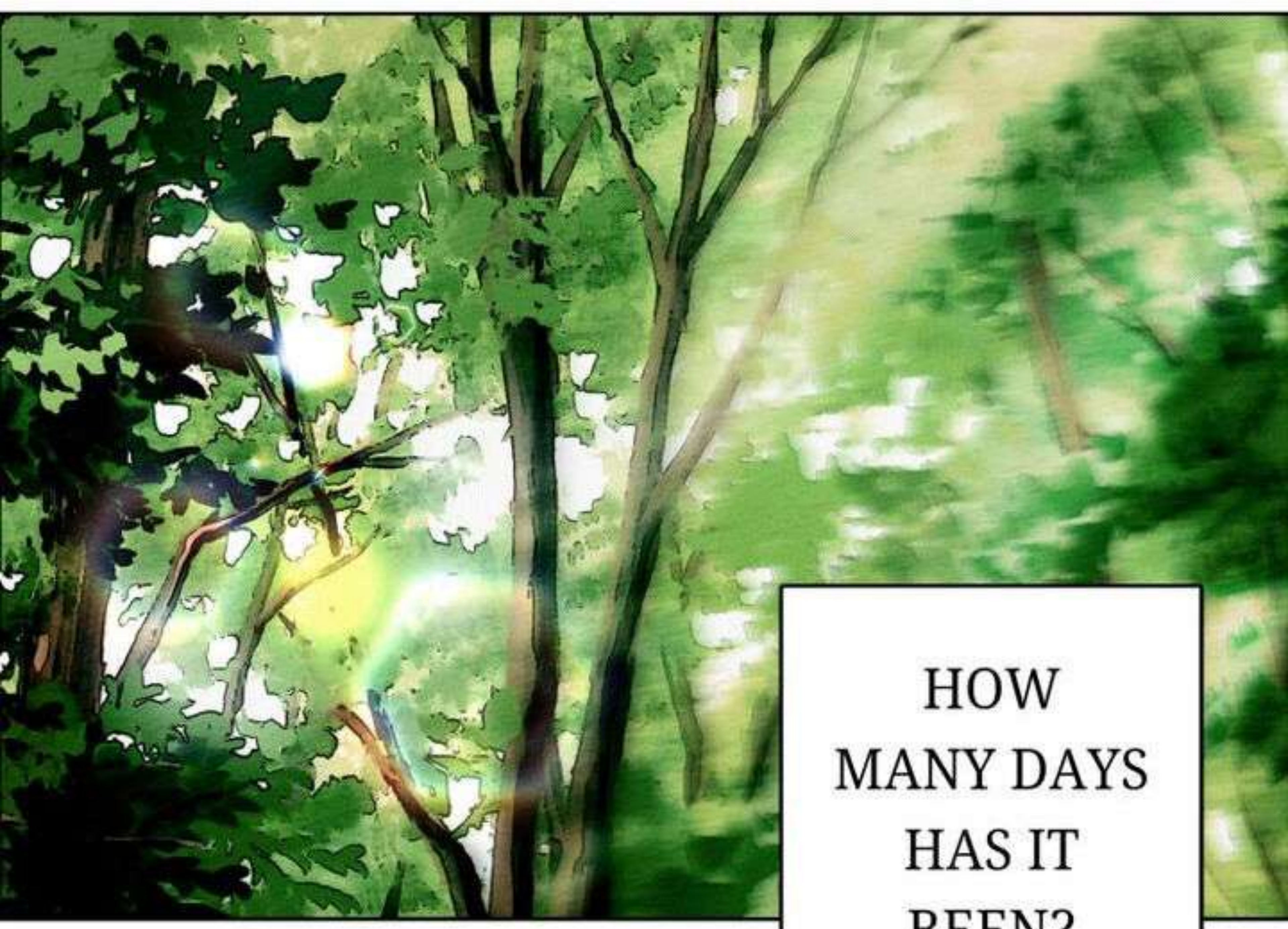
IT'S WARM.
SO THIS IS WHAT THEY CALL MAGIC.
JUST MOMENTS

MOMENTS AGO,
I THOUGHT
I'D NEVER
FALL ASLEEP.



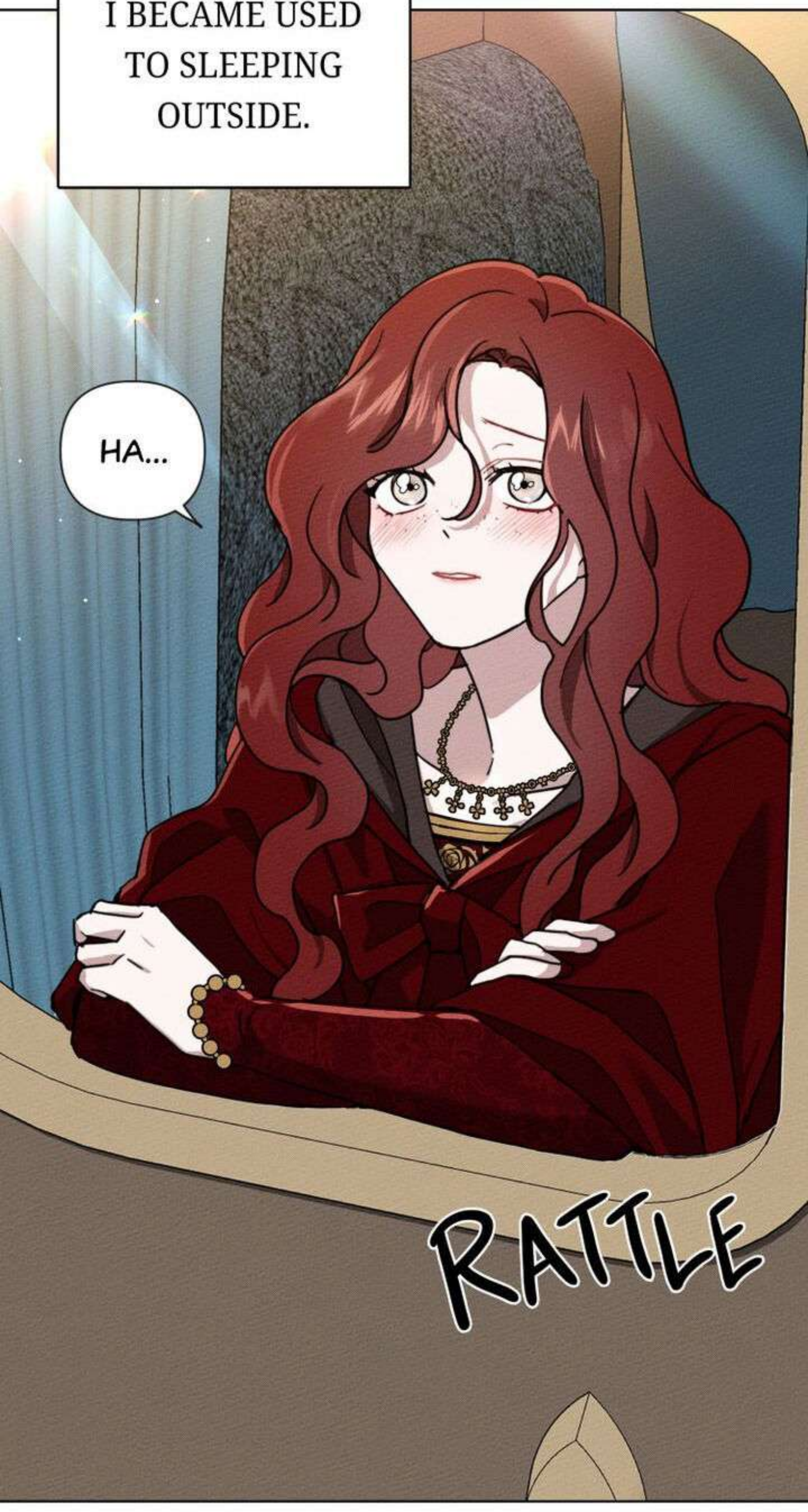
THIS MUST BE
WHAT SHARING
WARMTH
FEELS LIKE.
IT'S SEEPING
INTO MY HEART
AND LULLING
ME INTO
A DEEP SLEEP.

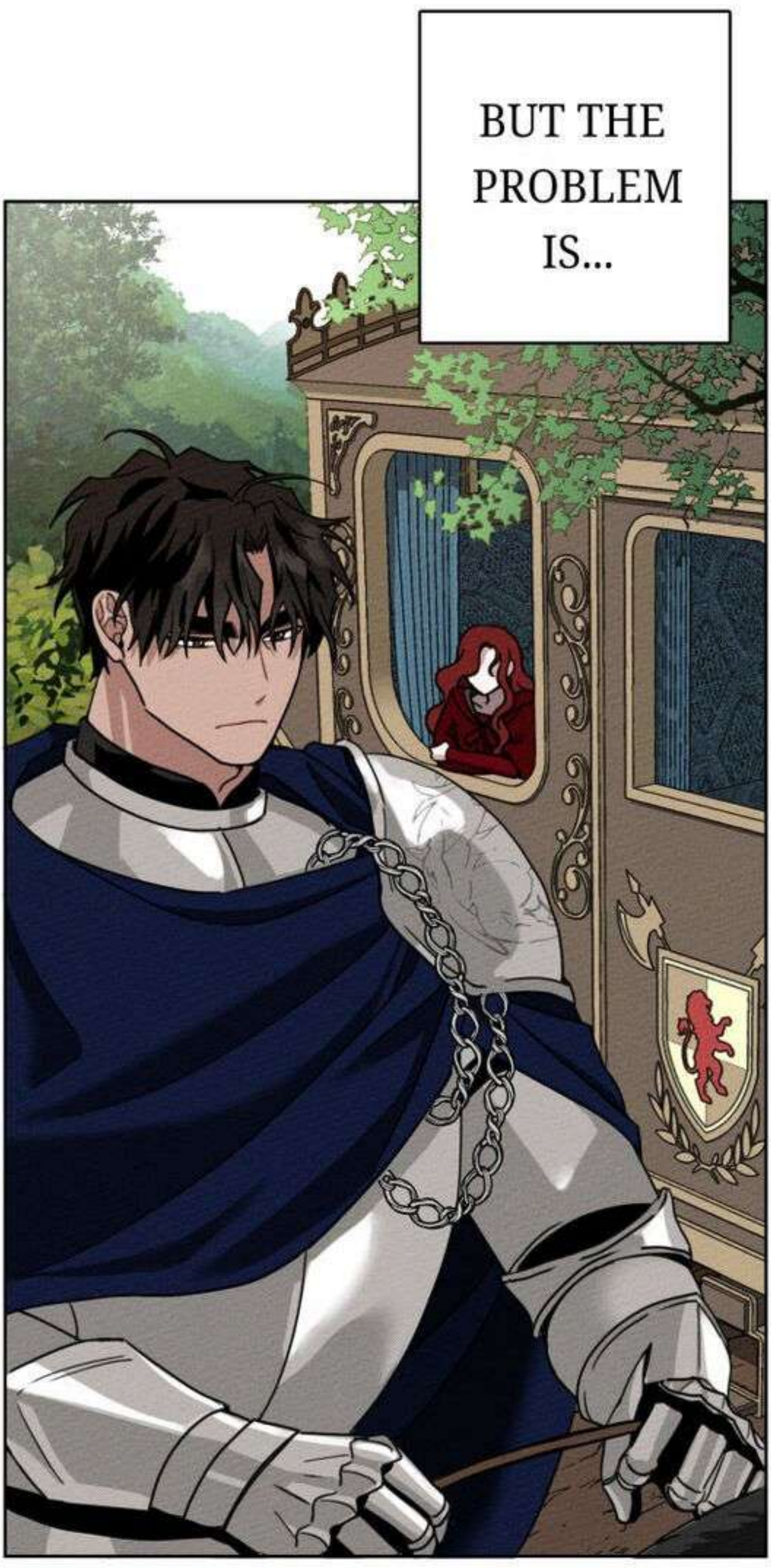
RATTLE



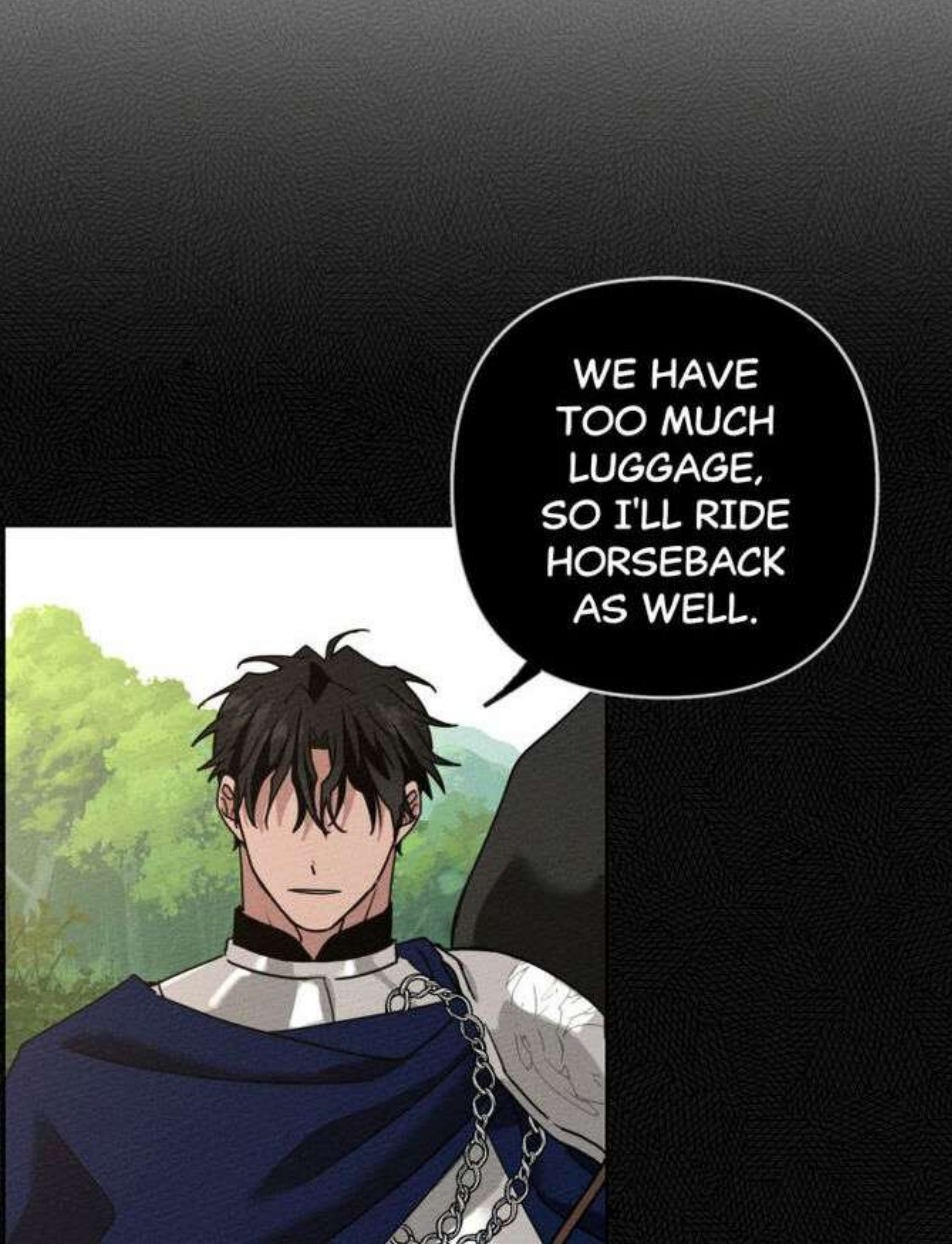
HOW MANY DAYS HAS IT BEEN?

AFTER THE FIRST NIGHT, I BECAME USED TO SLEEPING OUTSIDE.

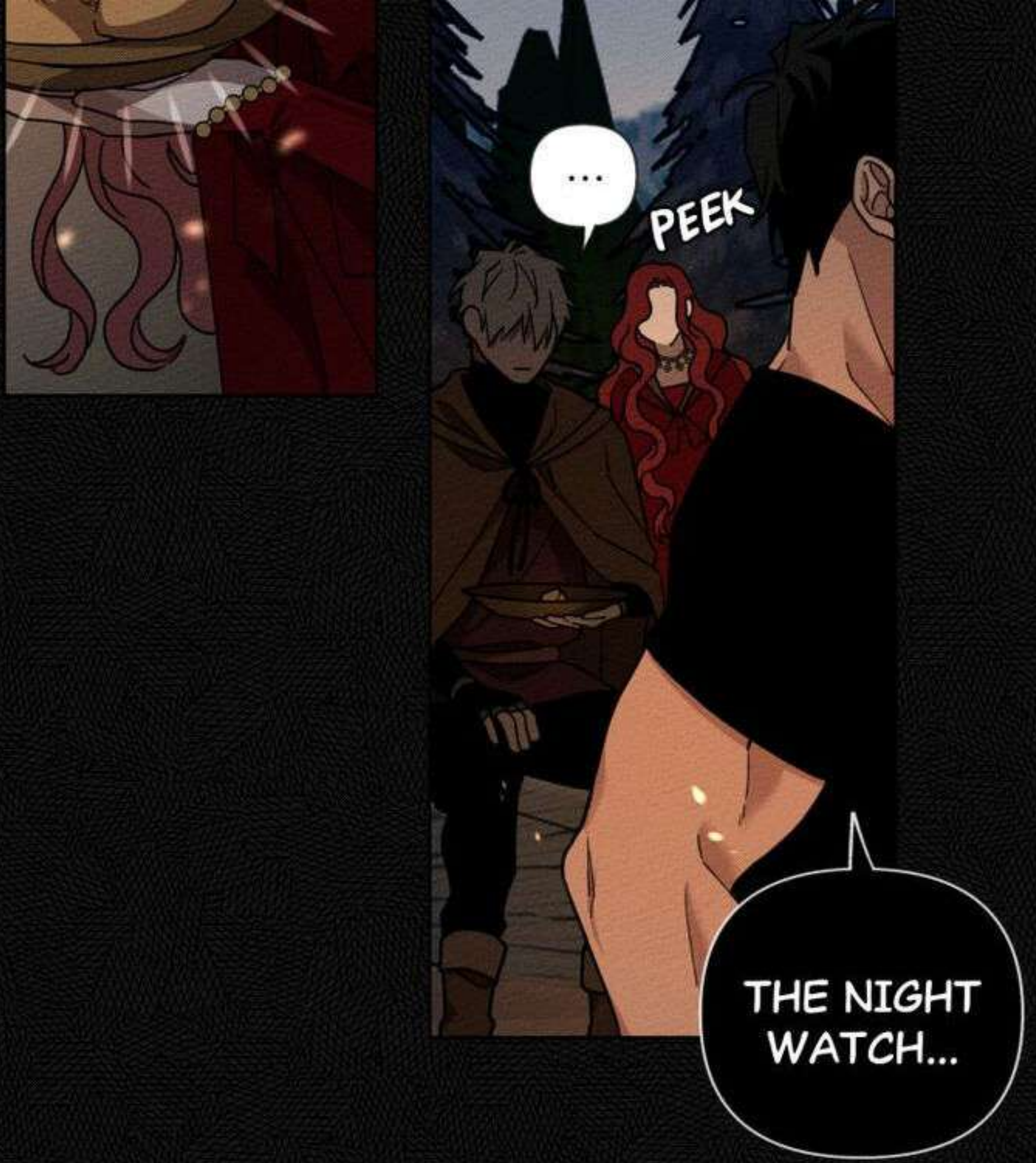


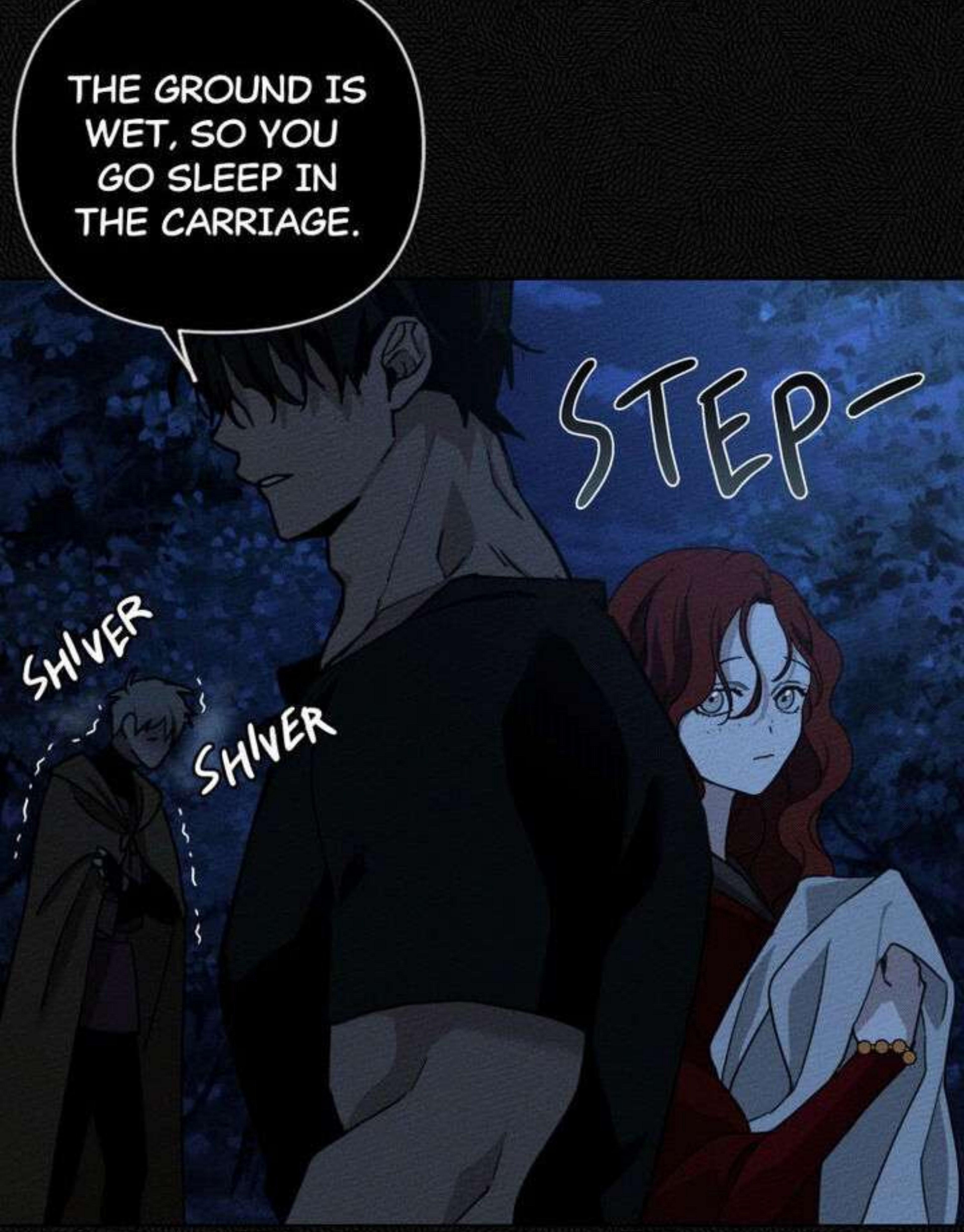

BUT THE PROBLEM IS...

IS HE REALLY AVOIDING ME...?

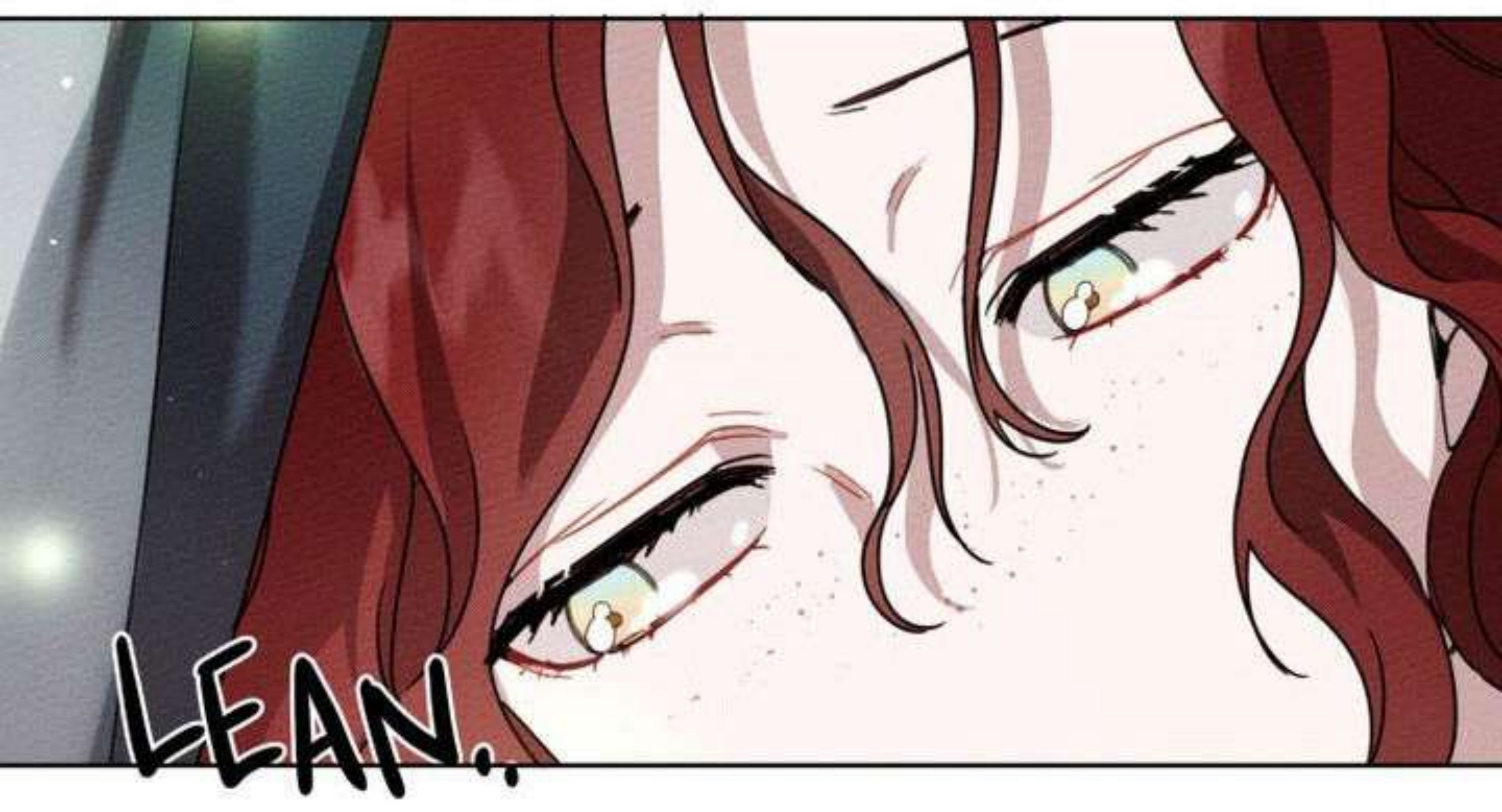

WE HAVE TOO MUCH LUGGAGE, SO I'LL RIDE HORSEBACK AS WELL.

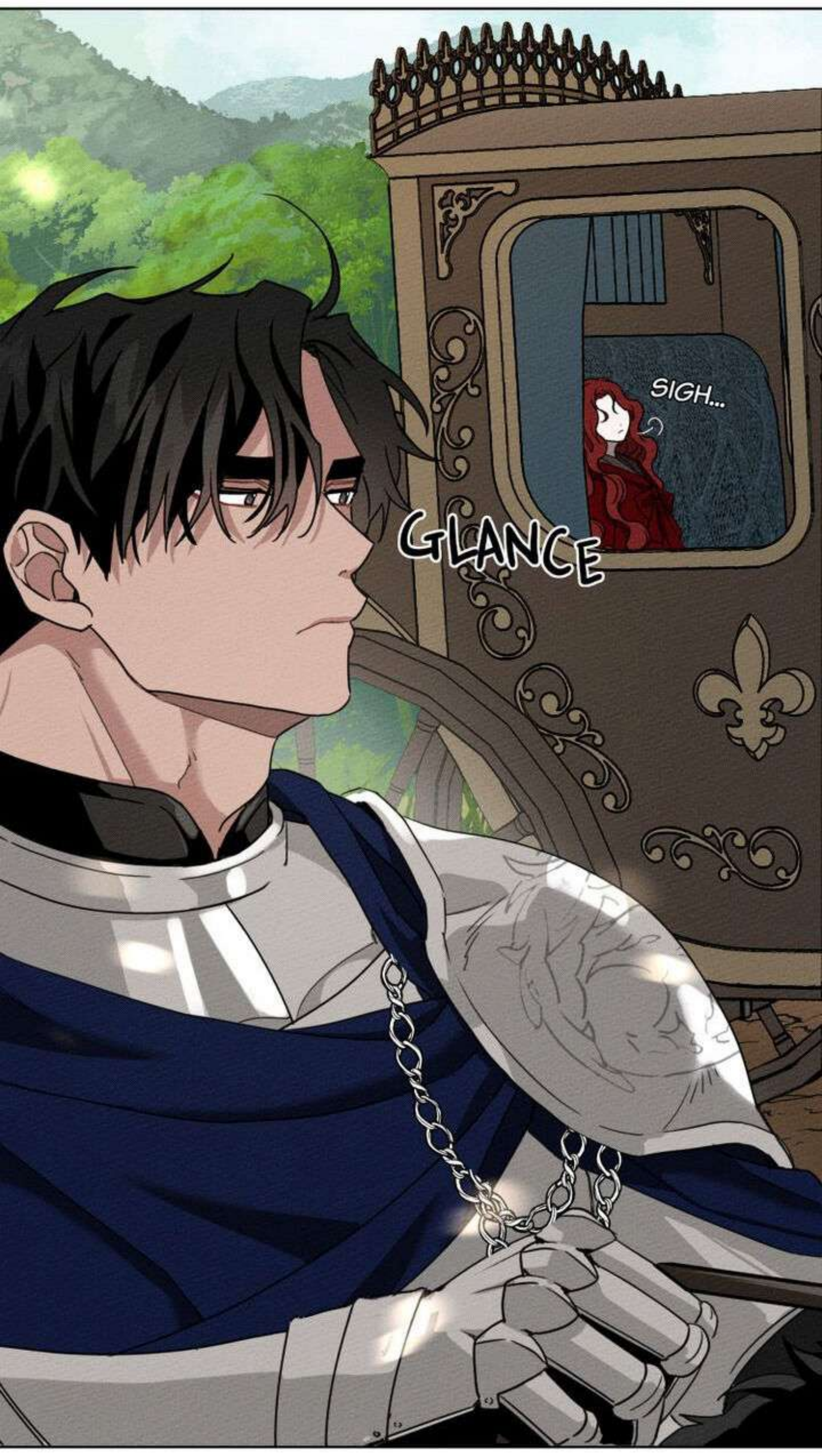
THE CARRIAGE IS TOO SMALL, SO IT'S BETTER FOR YOU TO SLEEP ALONE.
CHATTER
CHATTER
CRACKLE
S-SO BIG...

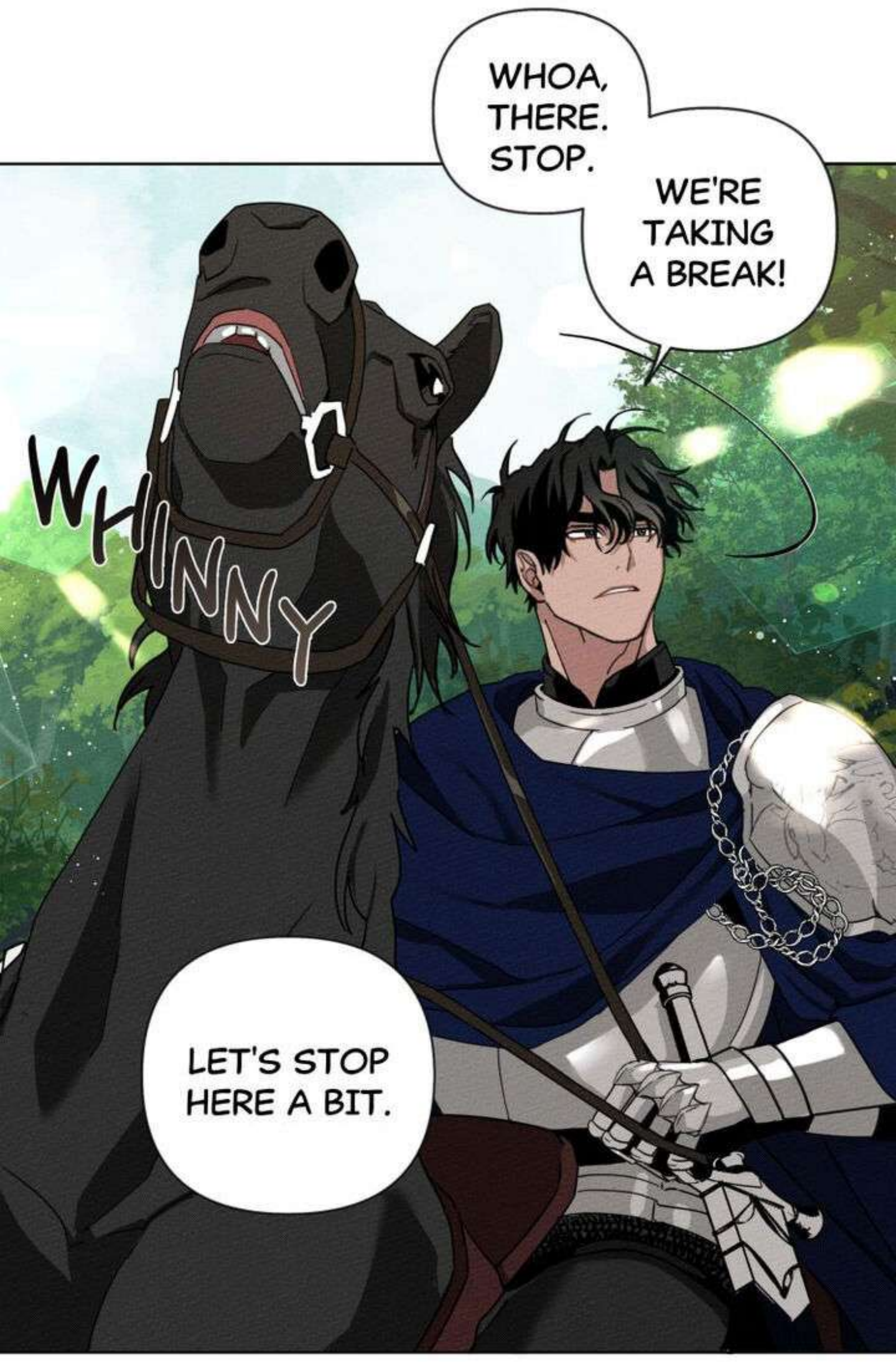

...
PEEK
THE NIGHT WATCH...

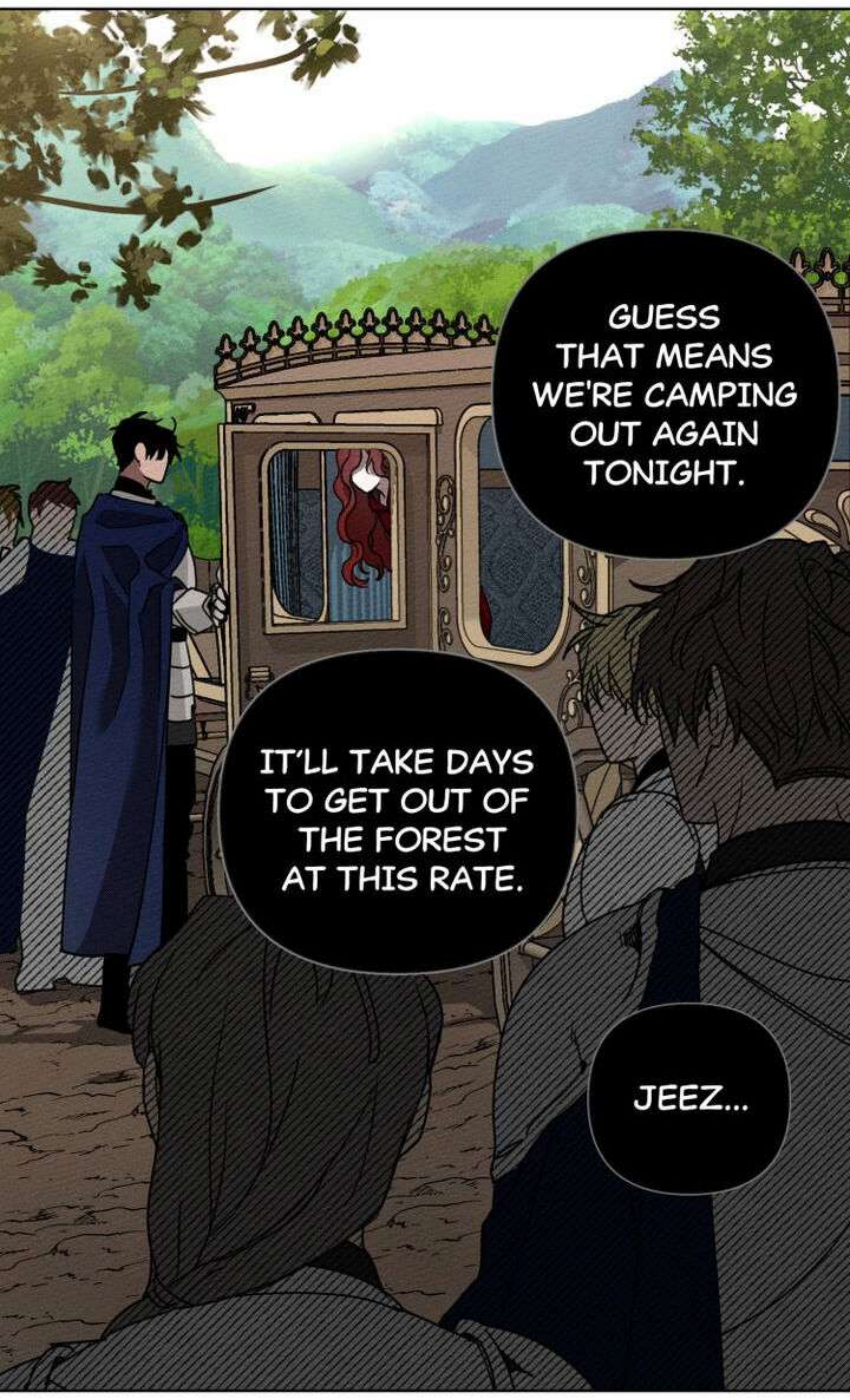

THE GROUND IS WET, SO YOU GO SLEEP IN THE CARRIAGE.
STEP-
SHIVER
SHIVER

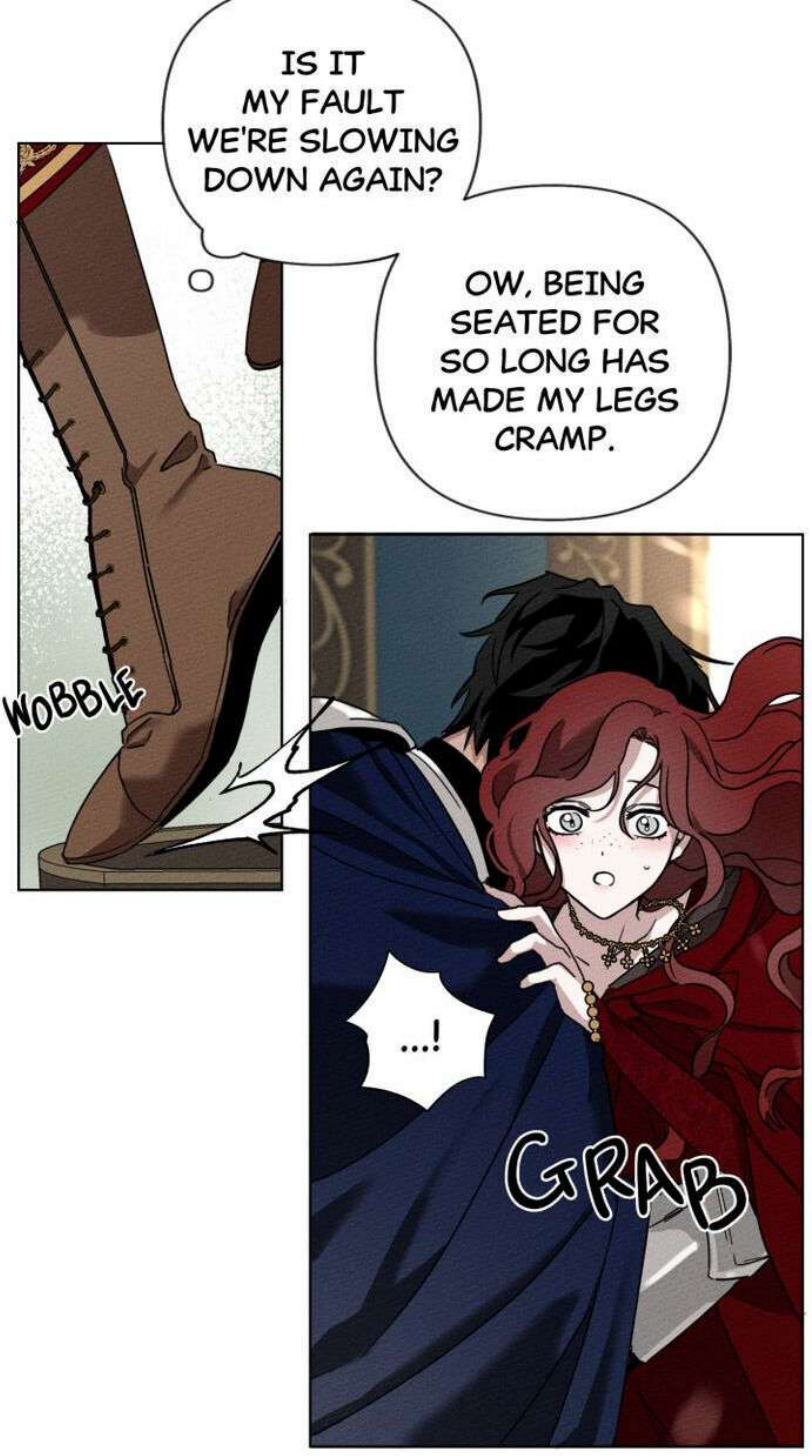
DOES HE FIND ME... BOTHERSOME NOW?

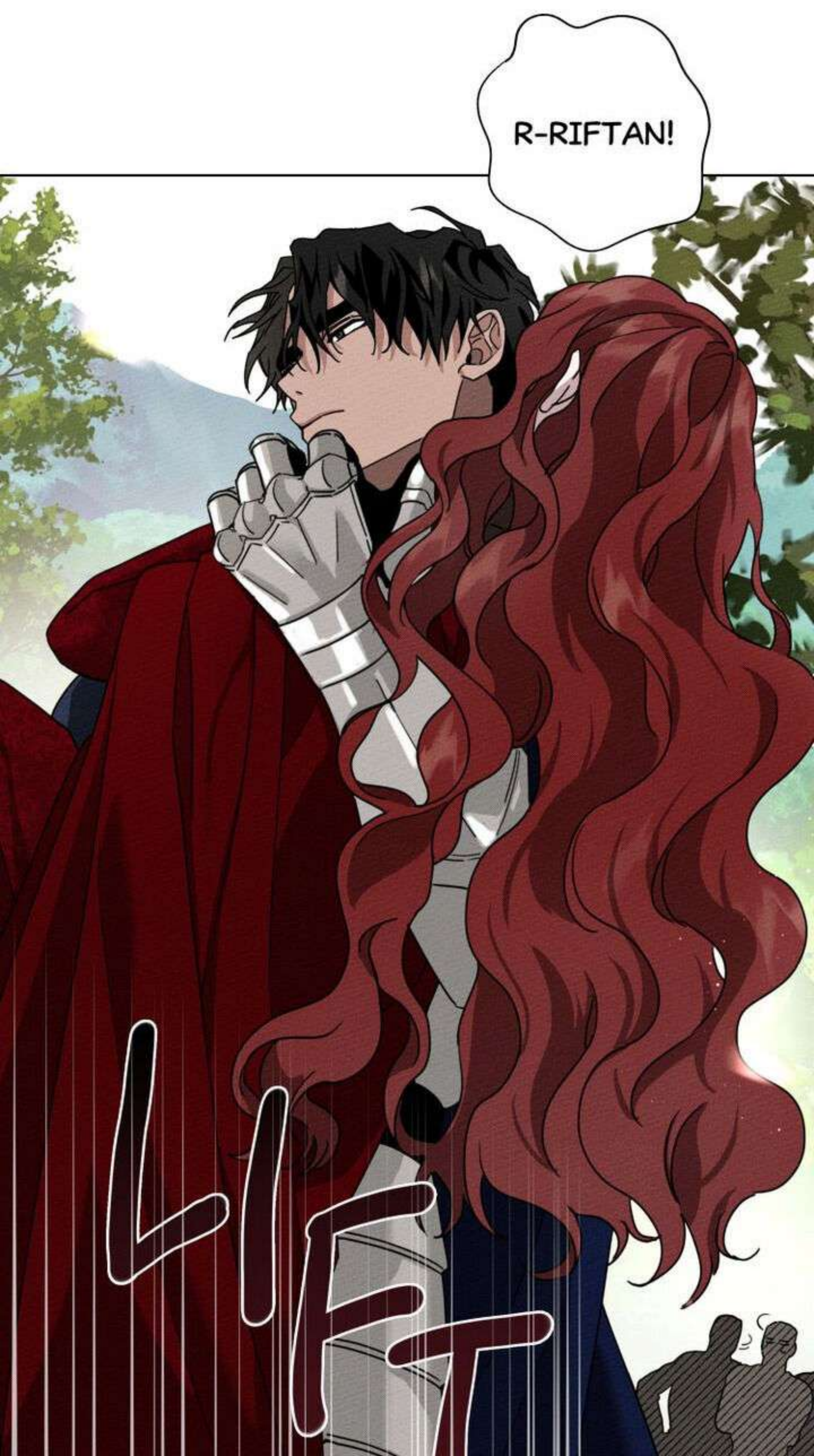

LEAN..

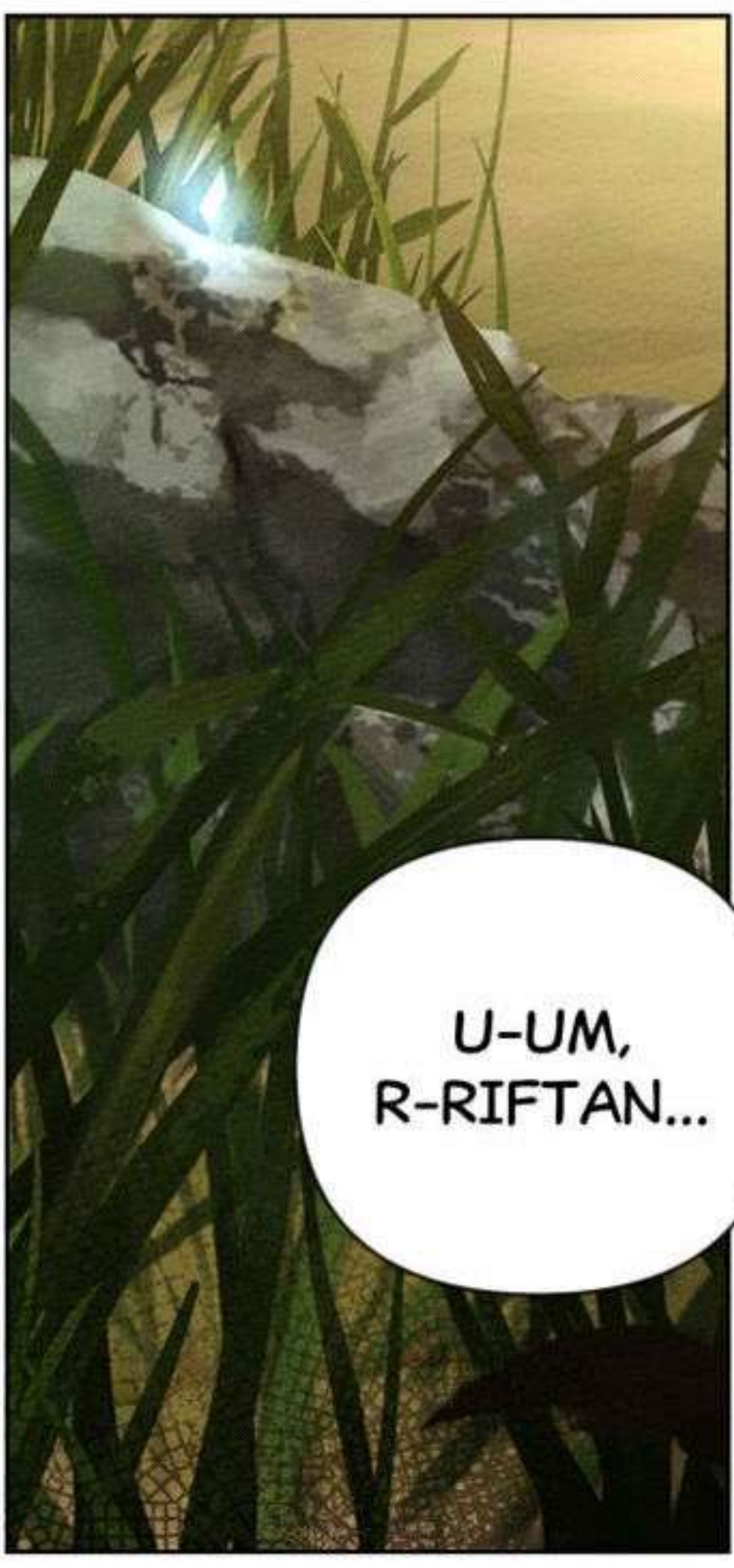

SIGH...
GLANCE

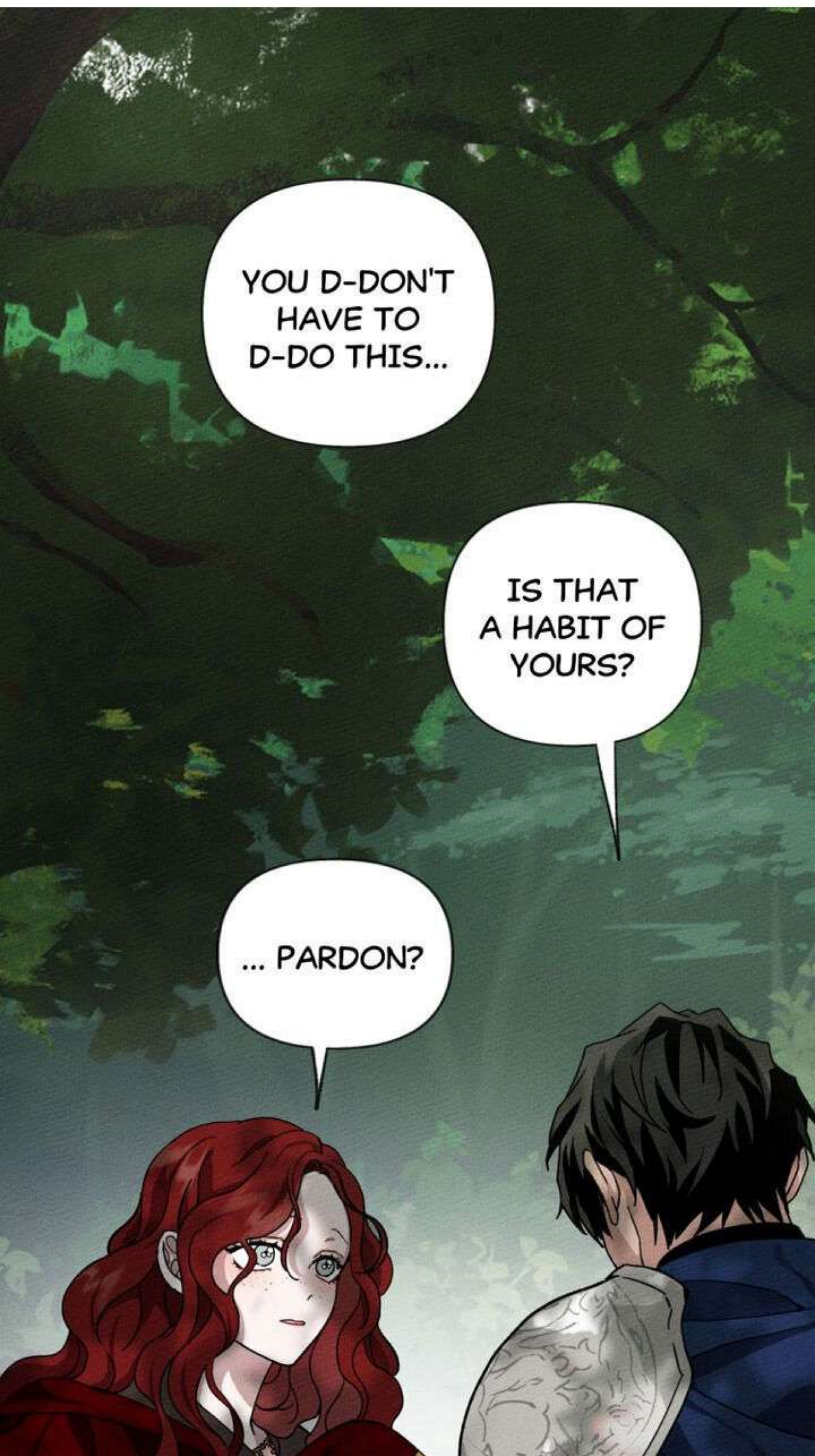

WHOA, THERE. STOP.
WE'RE TAKING A BREAK!
WHINNY
LET'S STOP HERE A BIT.

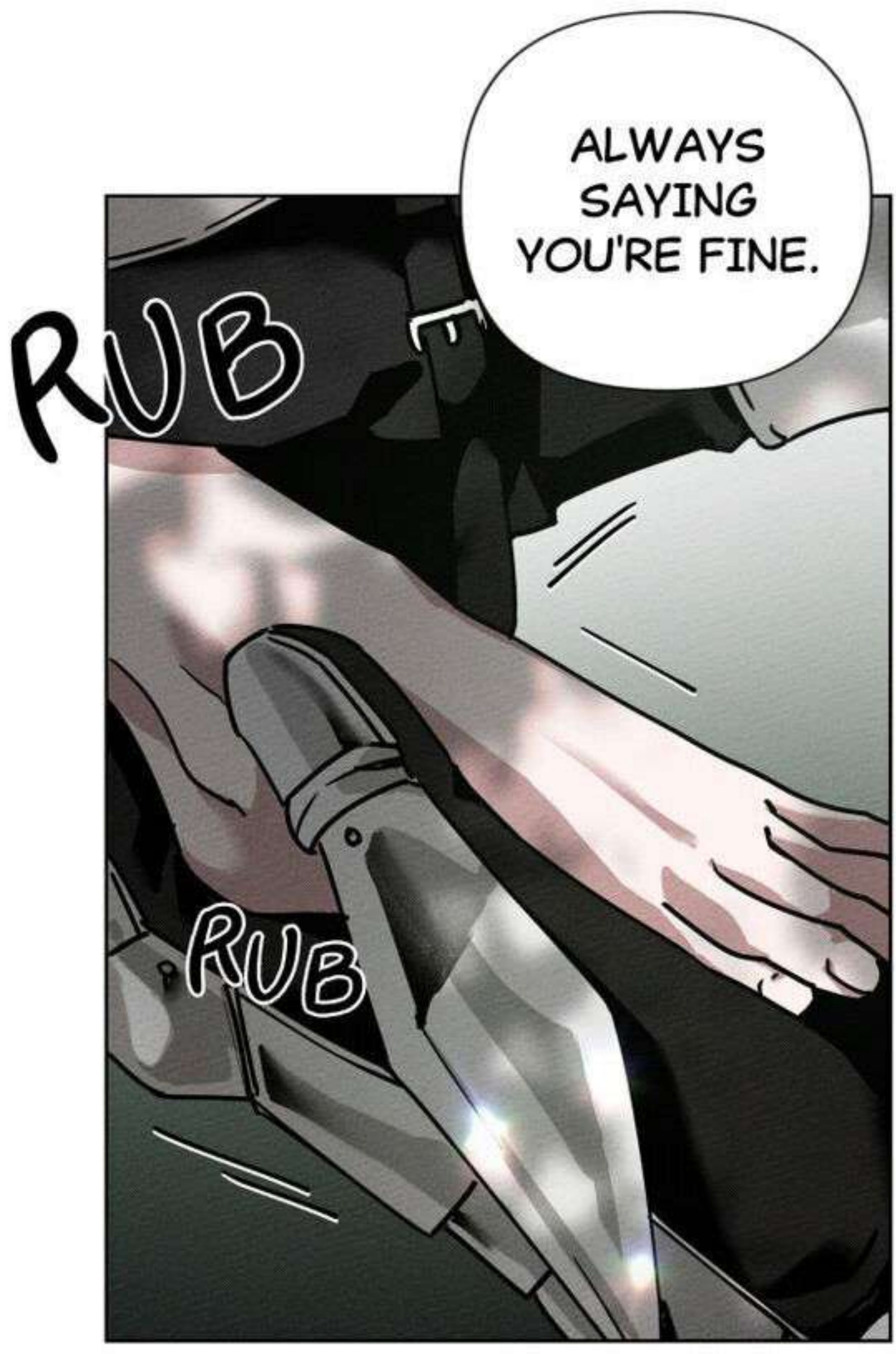

GUESS THAT MEANS WE'RE CAMPING OUT AGAIN TONIGHT.
IT'LL TAKE DAYS TO GET OUT OF THE FOREST AT THIS RATE.
JEEZ...

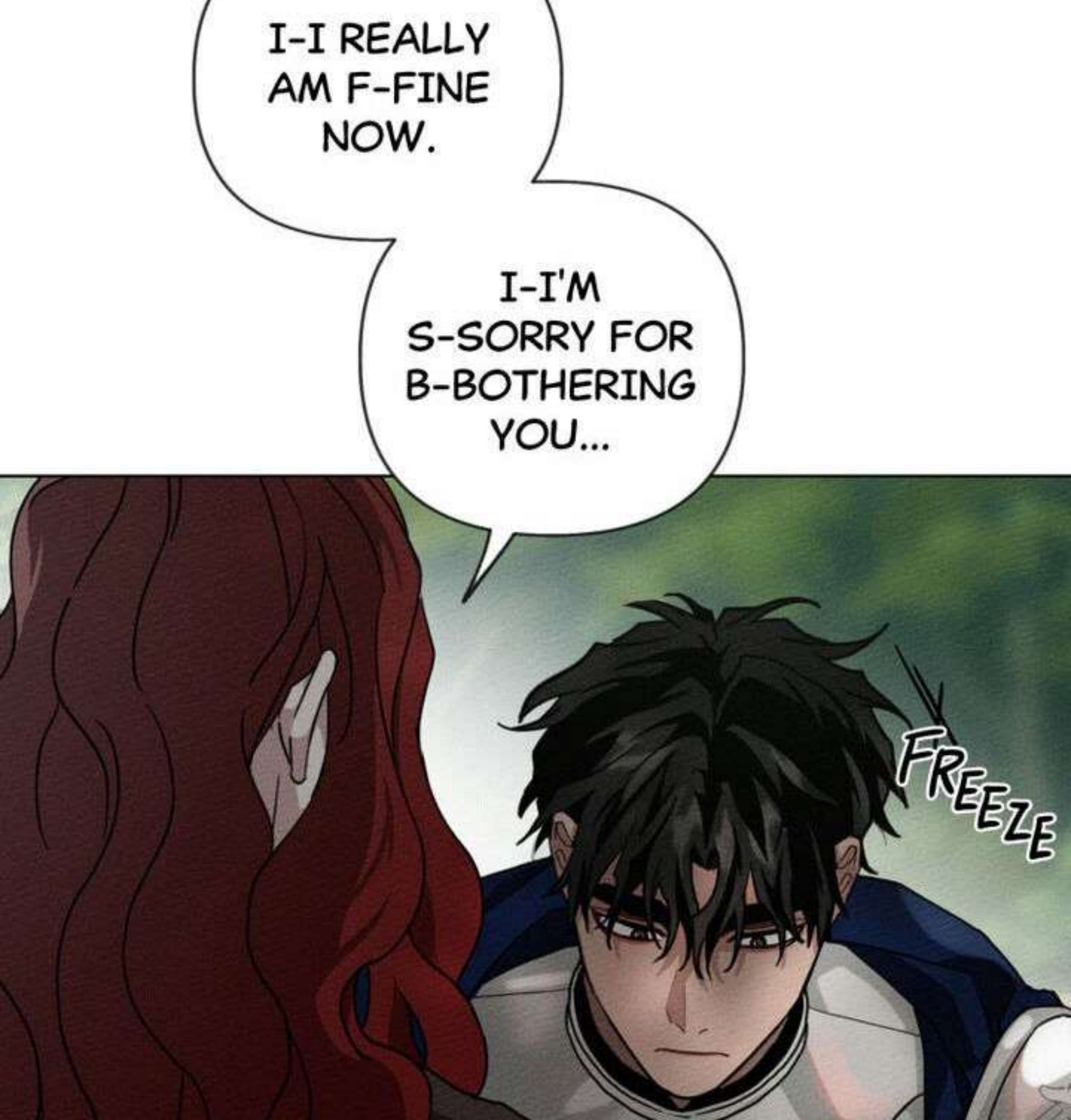

IS IT MY FAULT WE'RE SLOWING DOWN AGAIN?
OW, BEING SEATED FOR SO LONG HAS MADE MY LEGS CRAMP.
WOBBLE
...!
GRAB

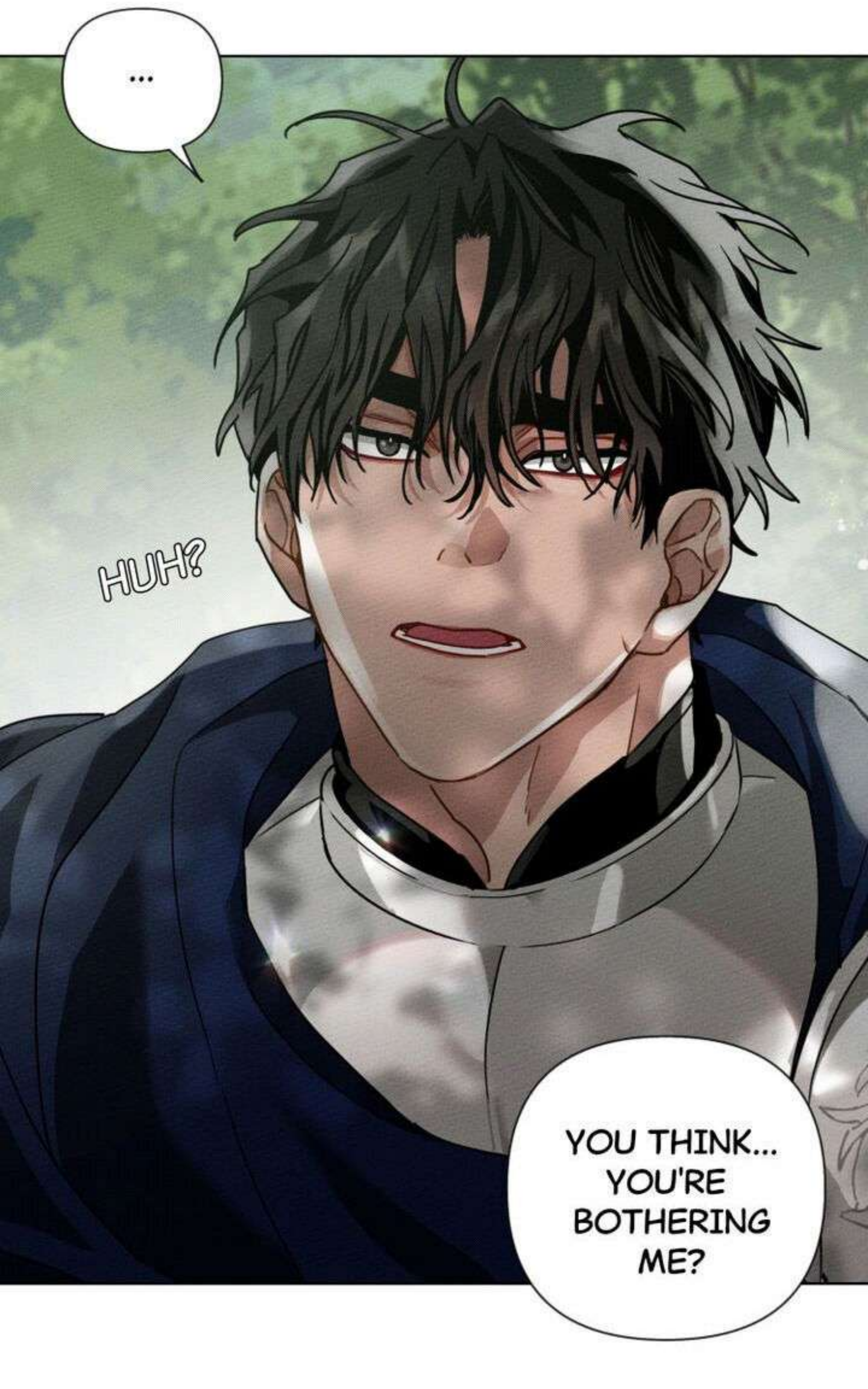

R-RIFTAN!
LIFT

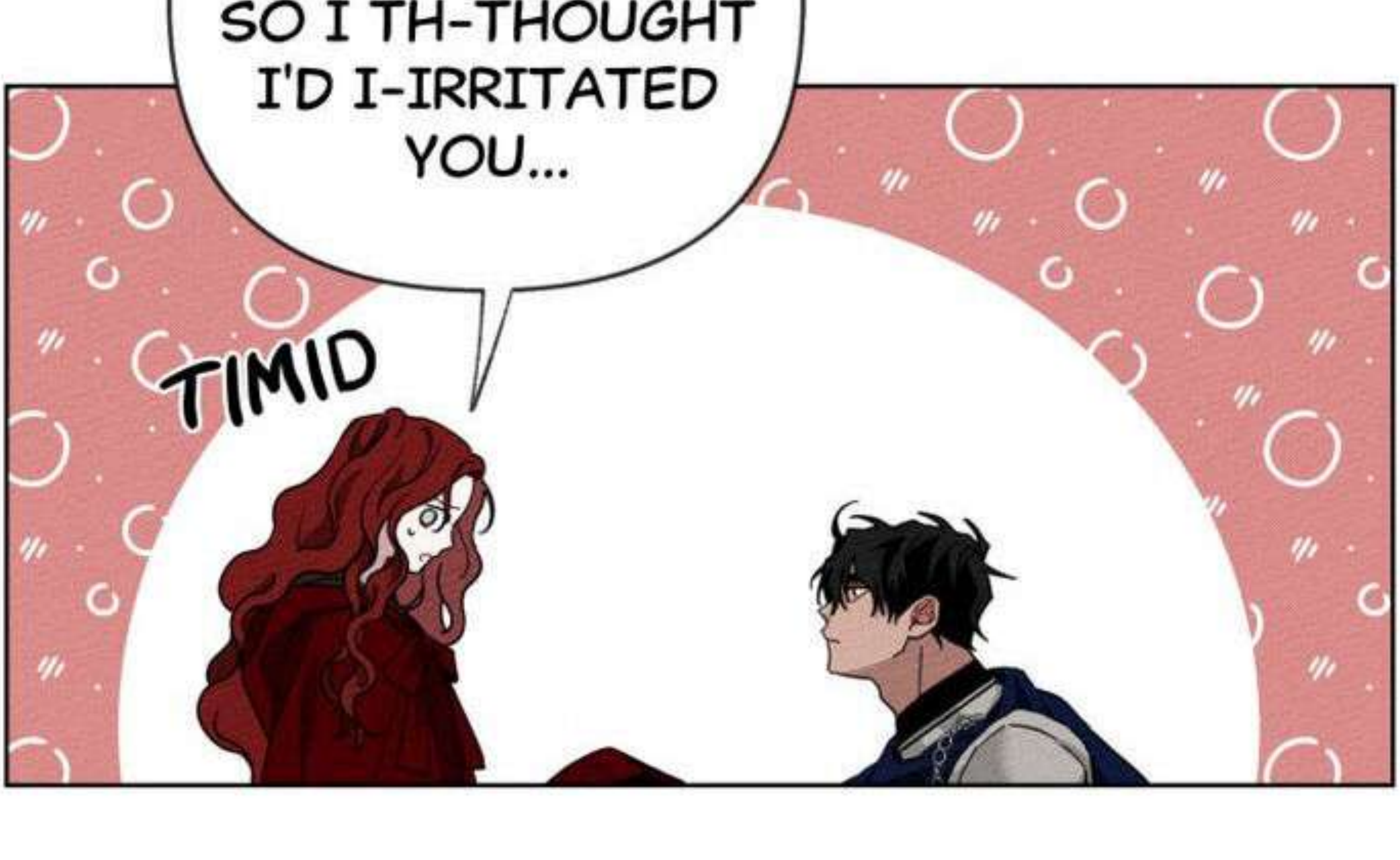

U-UM, R-RIFTAN...


YOU D-DON'T HAVE TO D-DO THIS...
IS THAT A HABIT OF YOURS?
... PARDON?

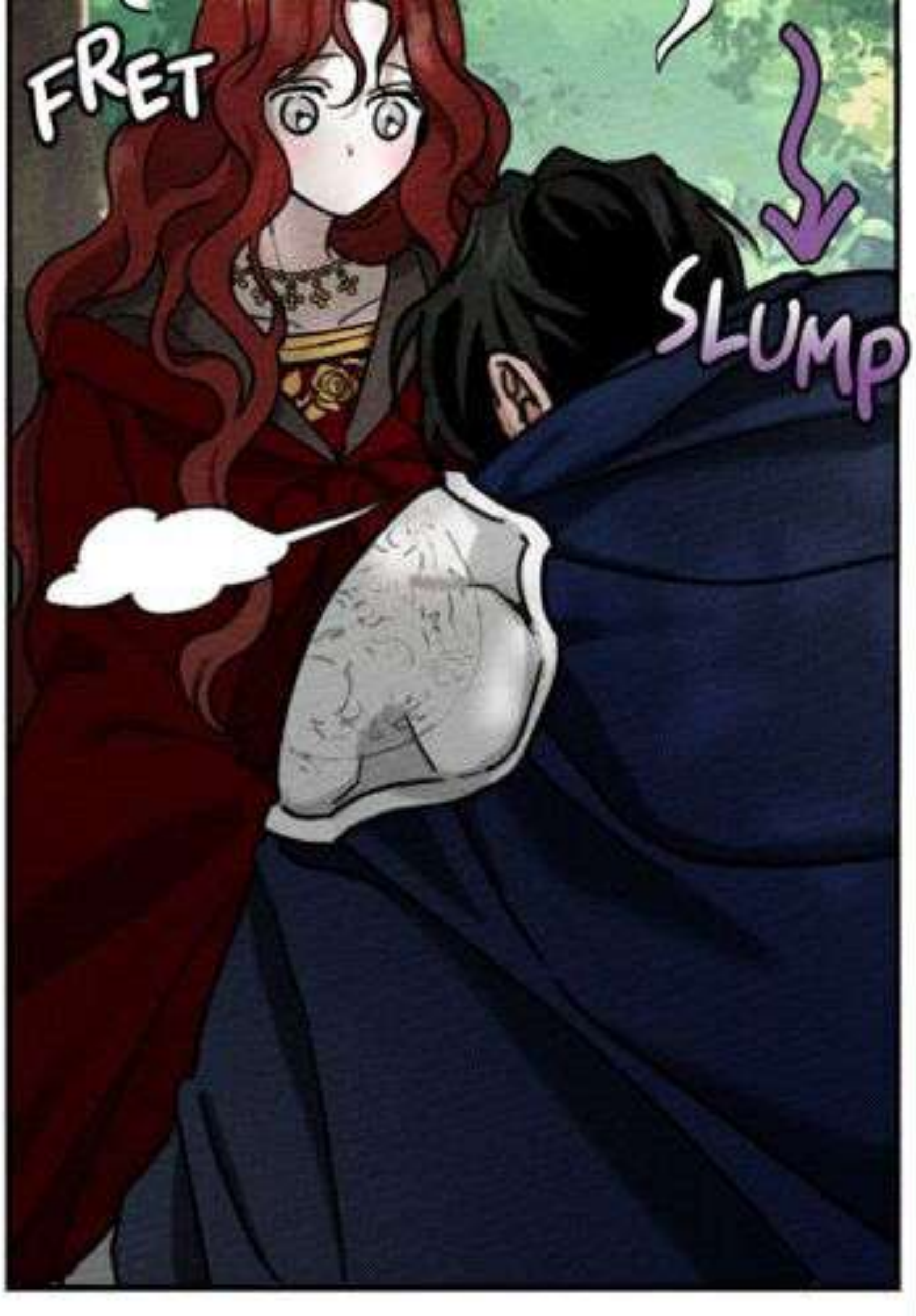

ALWAYS SAYING YOU'RE FINE.
RUB
RUB

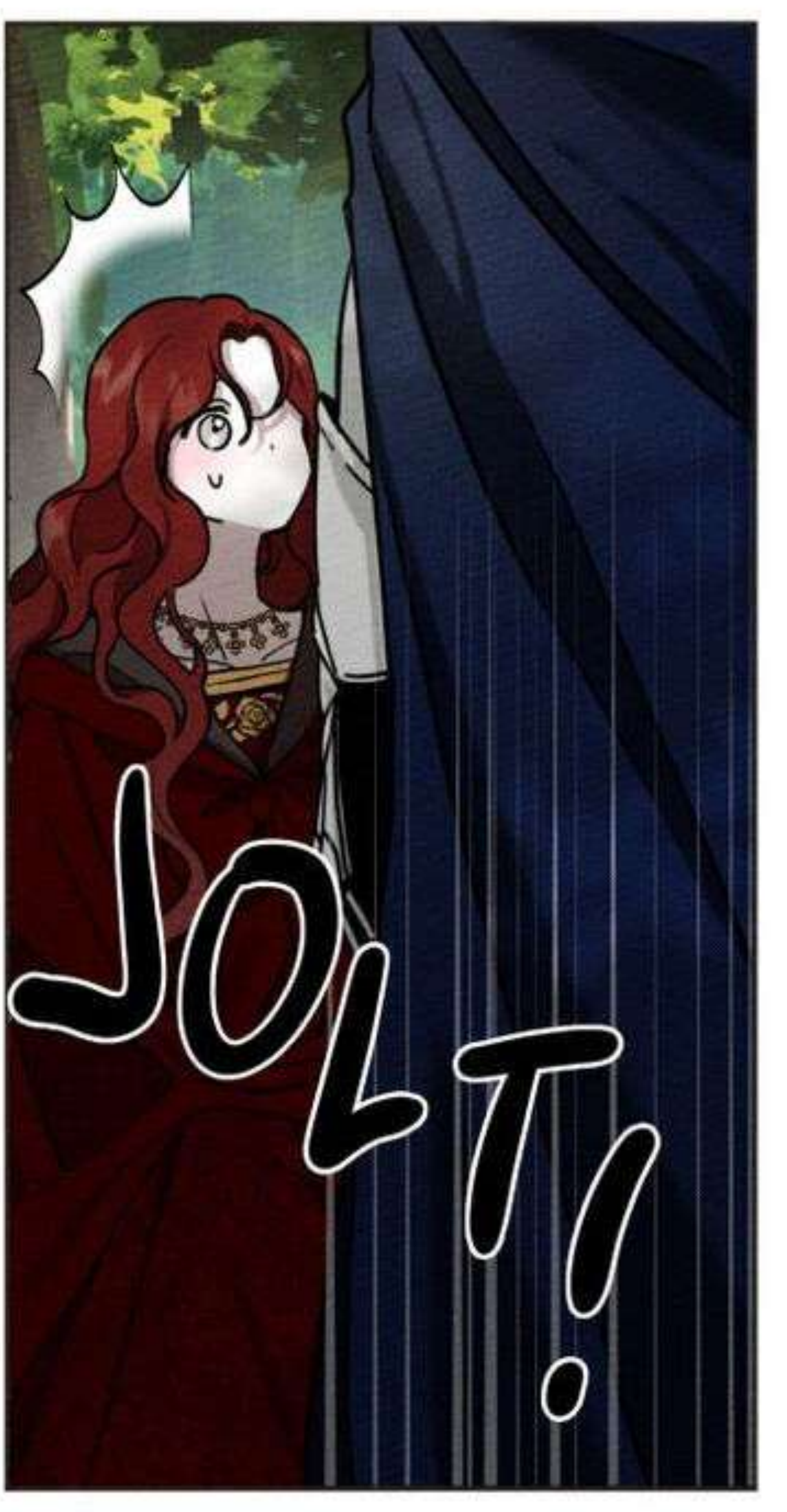

I-I REALLY AM F-FINE NOW.
I-I'M S-SORRY FOR B-BOTHERING YOU...
FREEZE


...
HUH?
YOU THINK... YOU'RE BOTHERING ME?

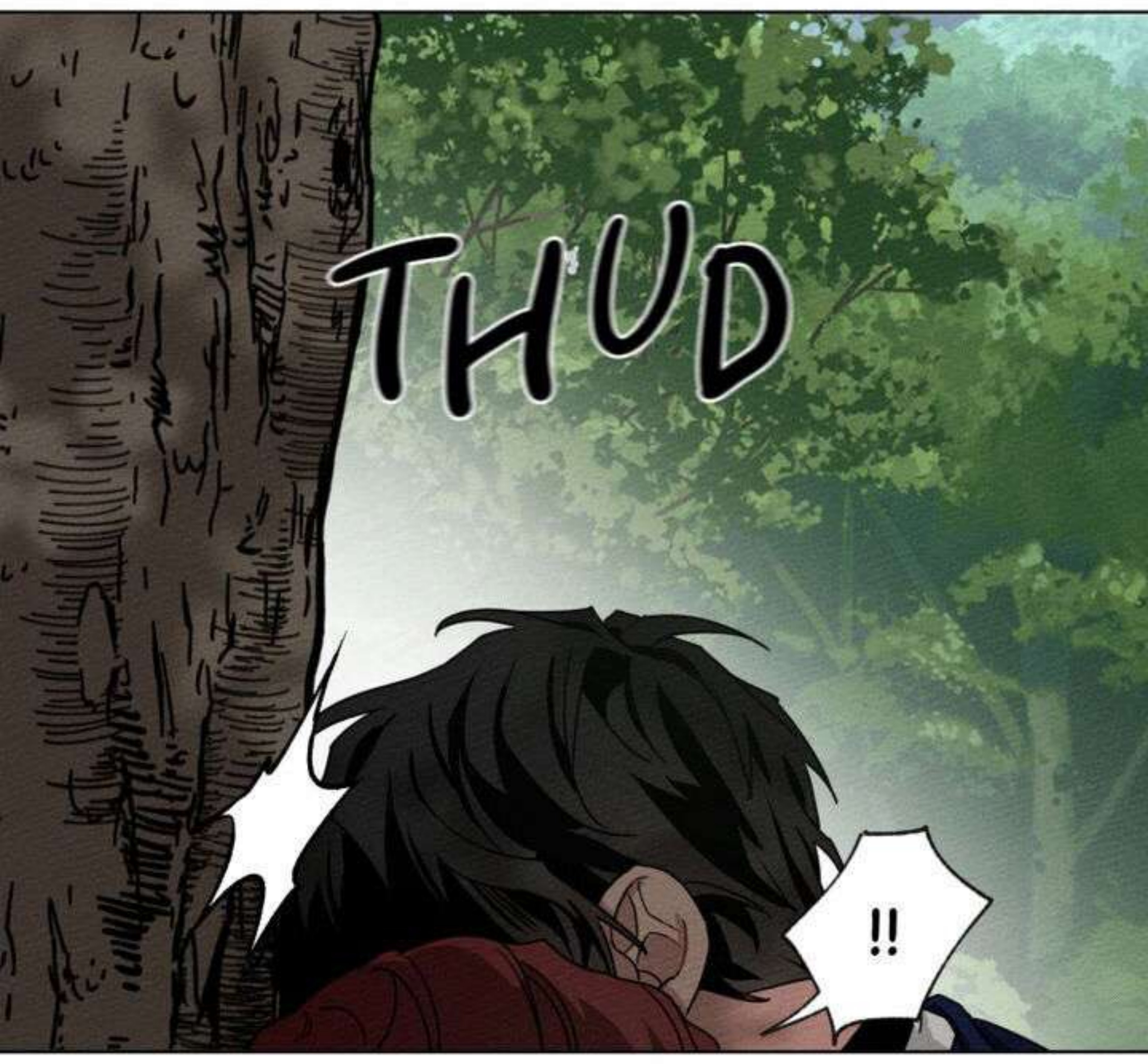

Y-YOU'VE BEEN SLEEPING ALONE, SO I TH-THOUGHT I'D I-IRRITATED YOU...
TIMID

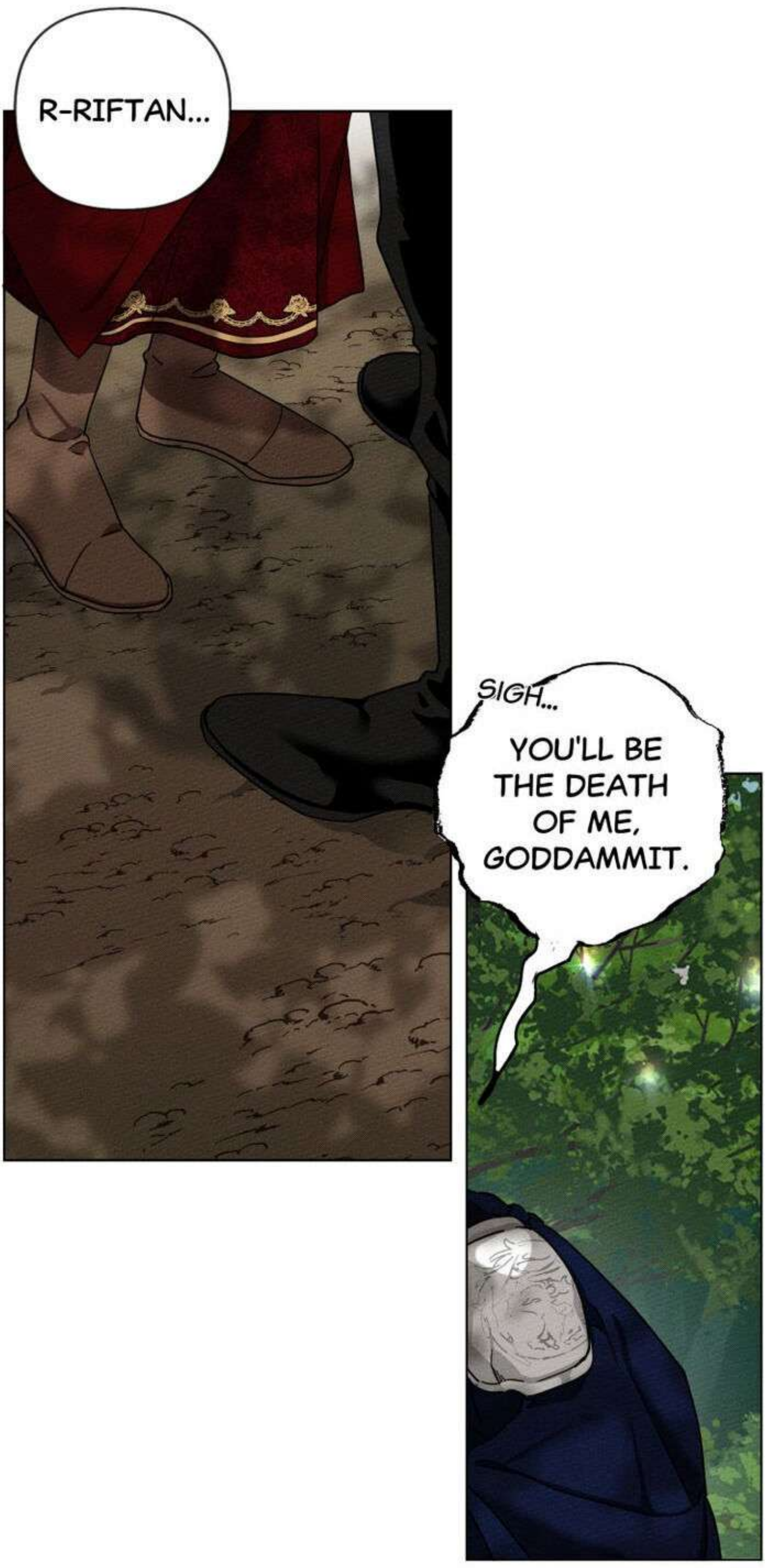
YOU'RE.. REALLY... HAA...


FRET
SLUMP

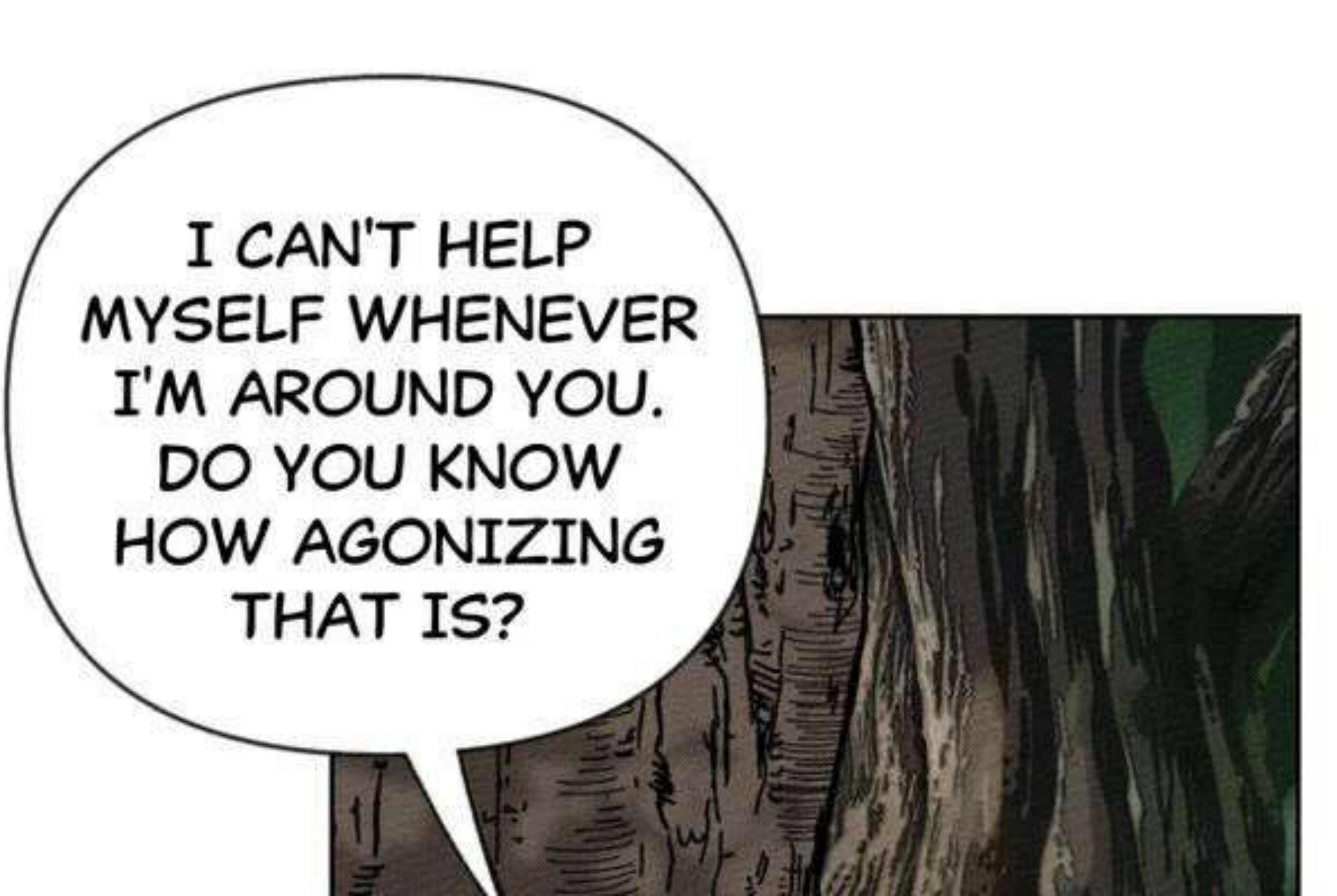

JOLT!

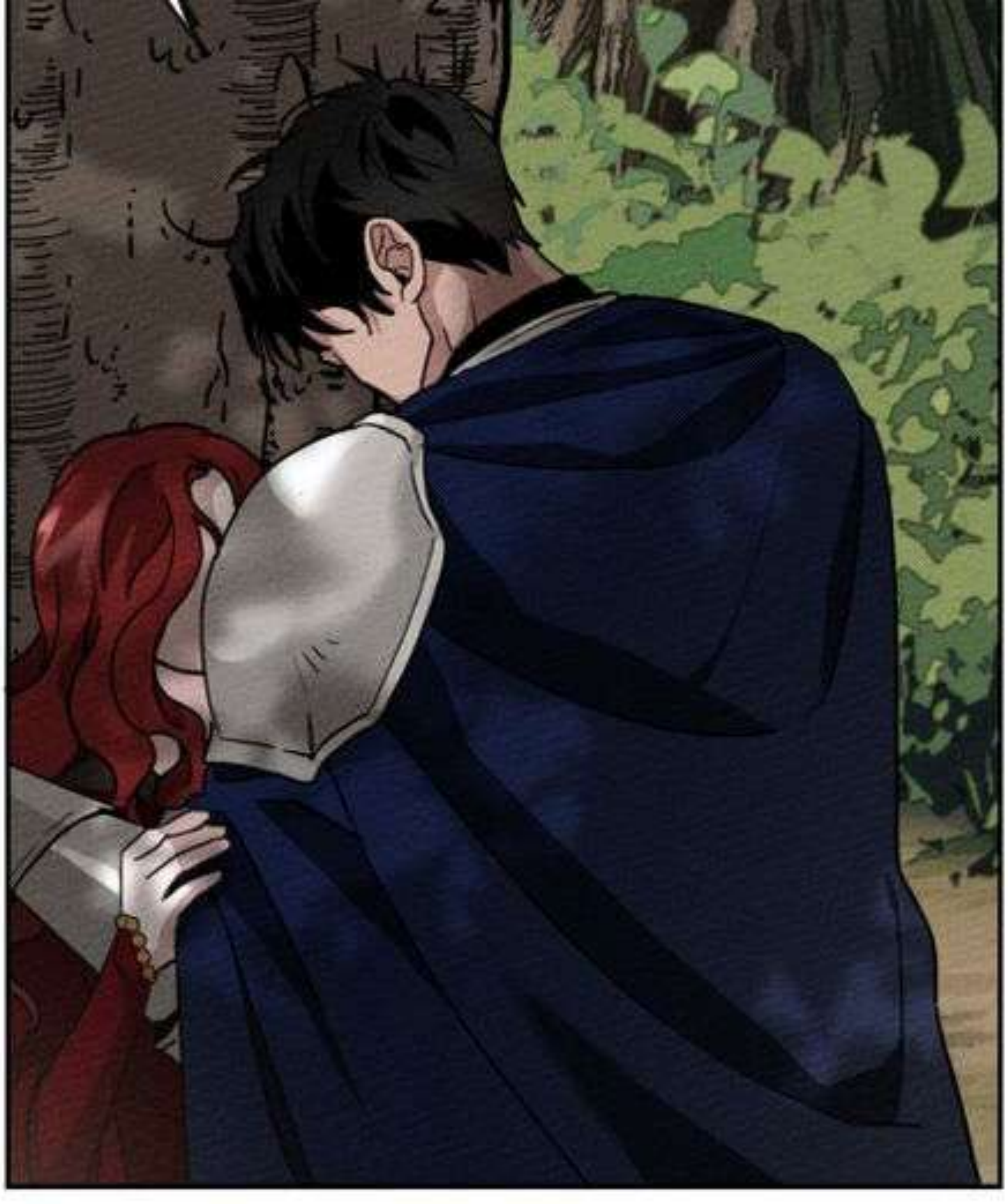
W-WAIT, W-WHERE–?!
GRAB
TRUDGE
R-RIFTAN!
TRUDGE
TRUDGE

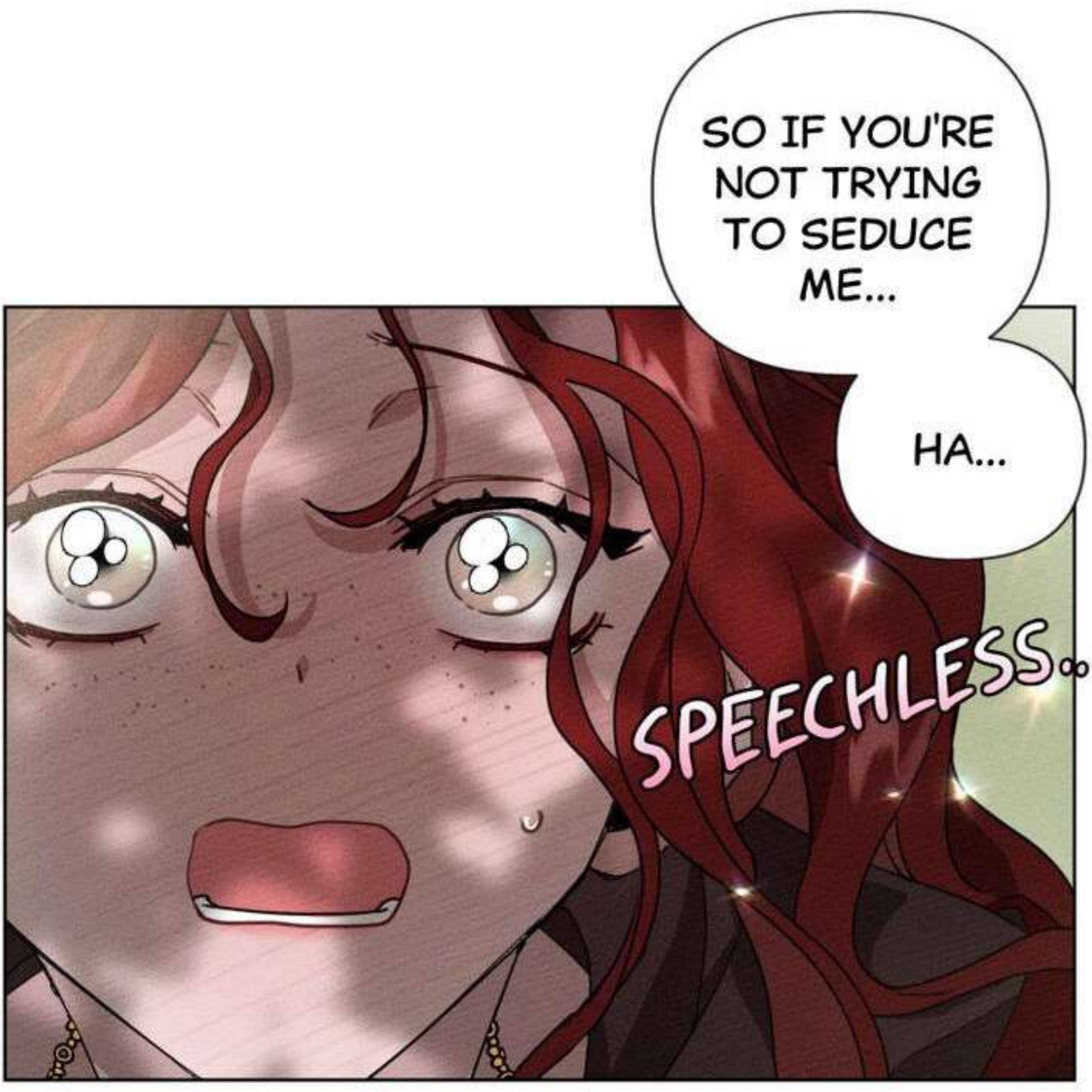

THUD
!!

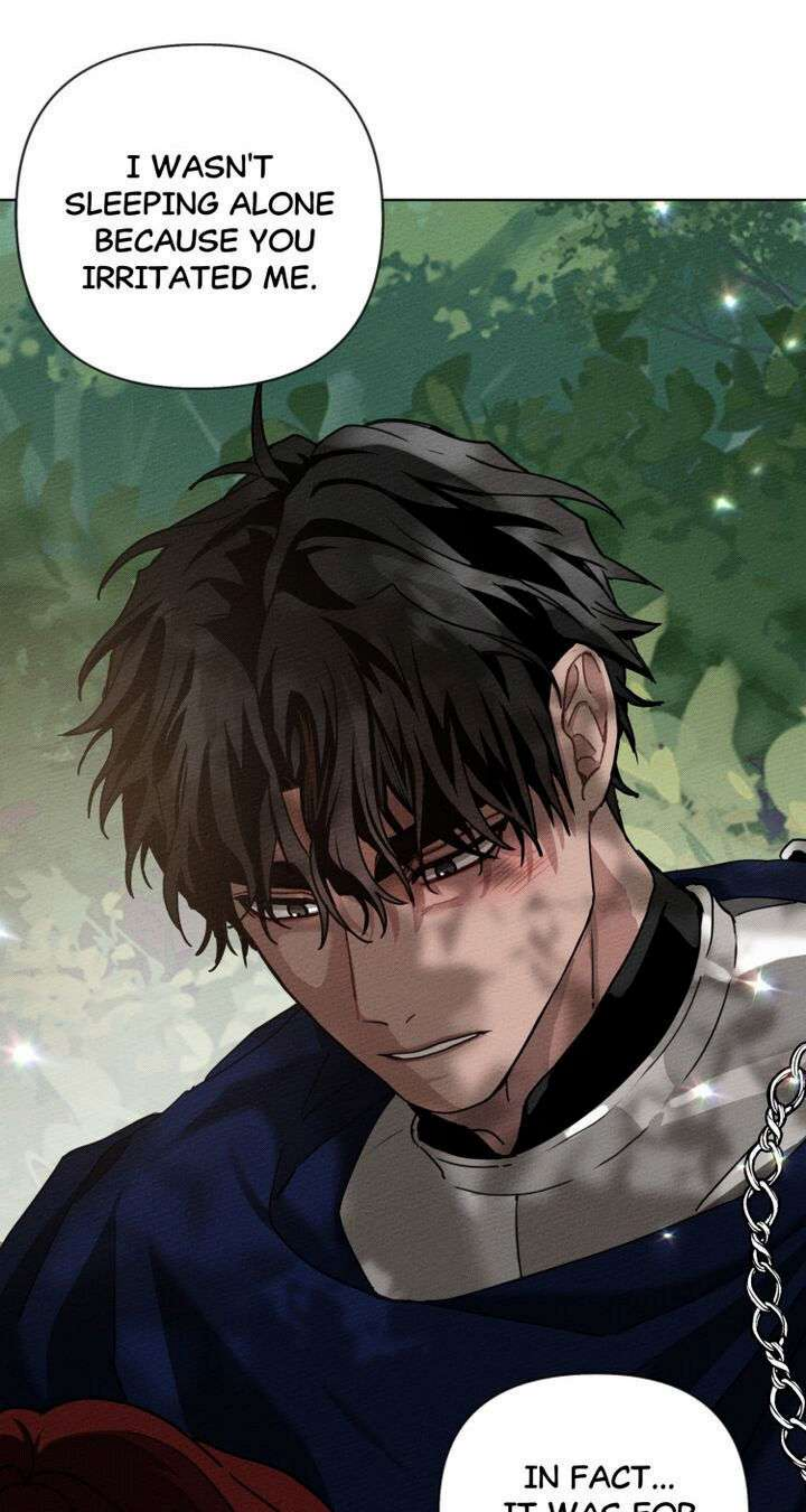

R-RIFTAN...
SIGH...
YOU'LL BE THE DEATH OF ME, GODDAMMIT.

...?!
PRESS♥

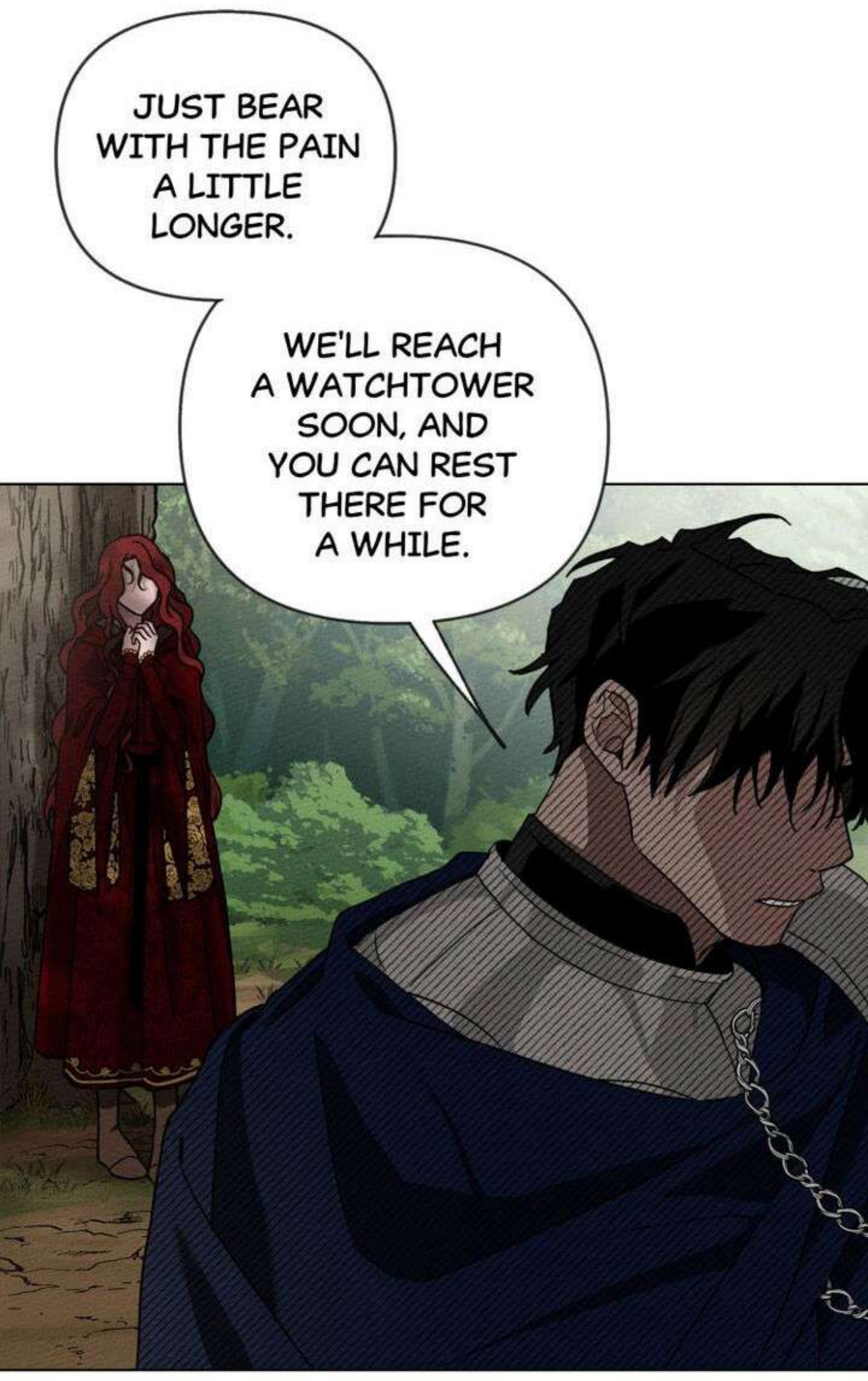

I CAN'T HELP MYSELF WHENEVER I'M AROUND YOU. DO YOU KNOW HOW AGONIZING THAT IS?

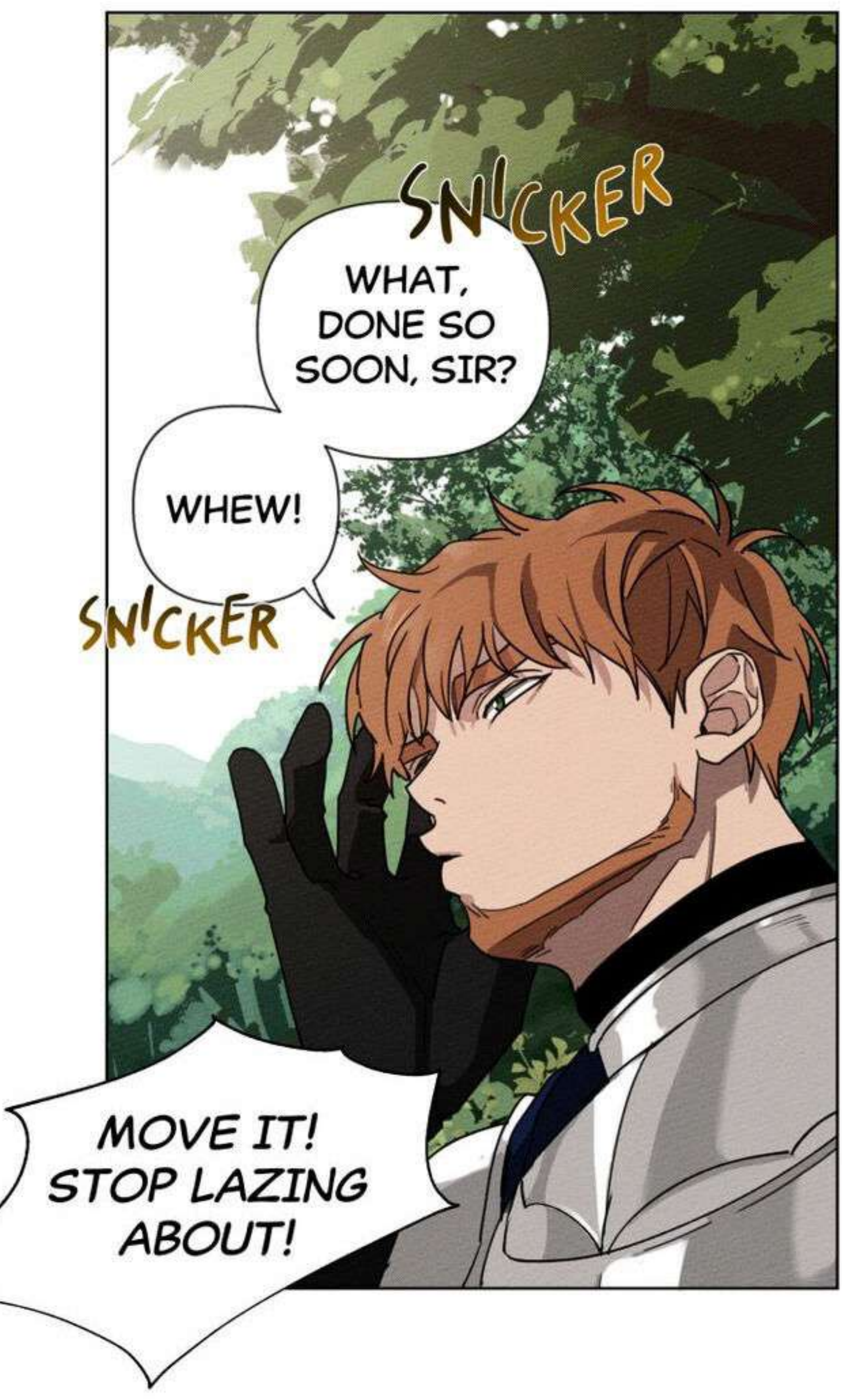



SO IF YOU'RE NOT TRYING TO SEDUCE ME...
HA...
SPEECHLESS..


I WASN'T SLEEPING ALONE BECAUSE YOU IRRITATED ME.
IN FACT... IT WAS FOR

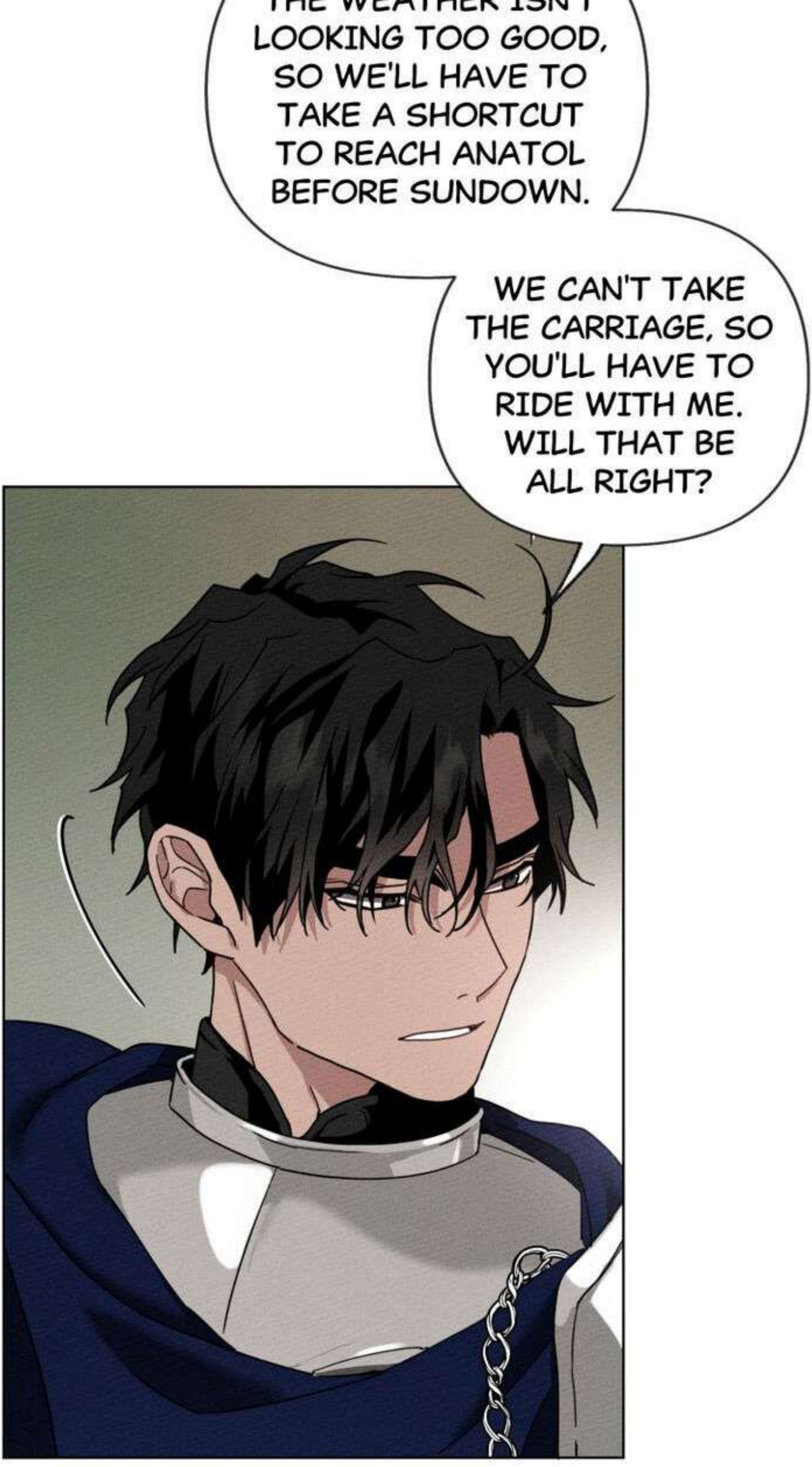
IT WAS FOR MY OWN SAKE.

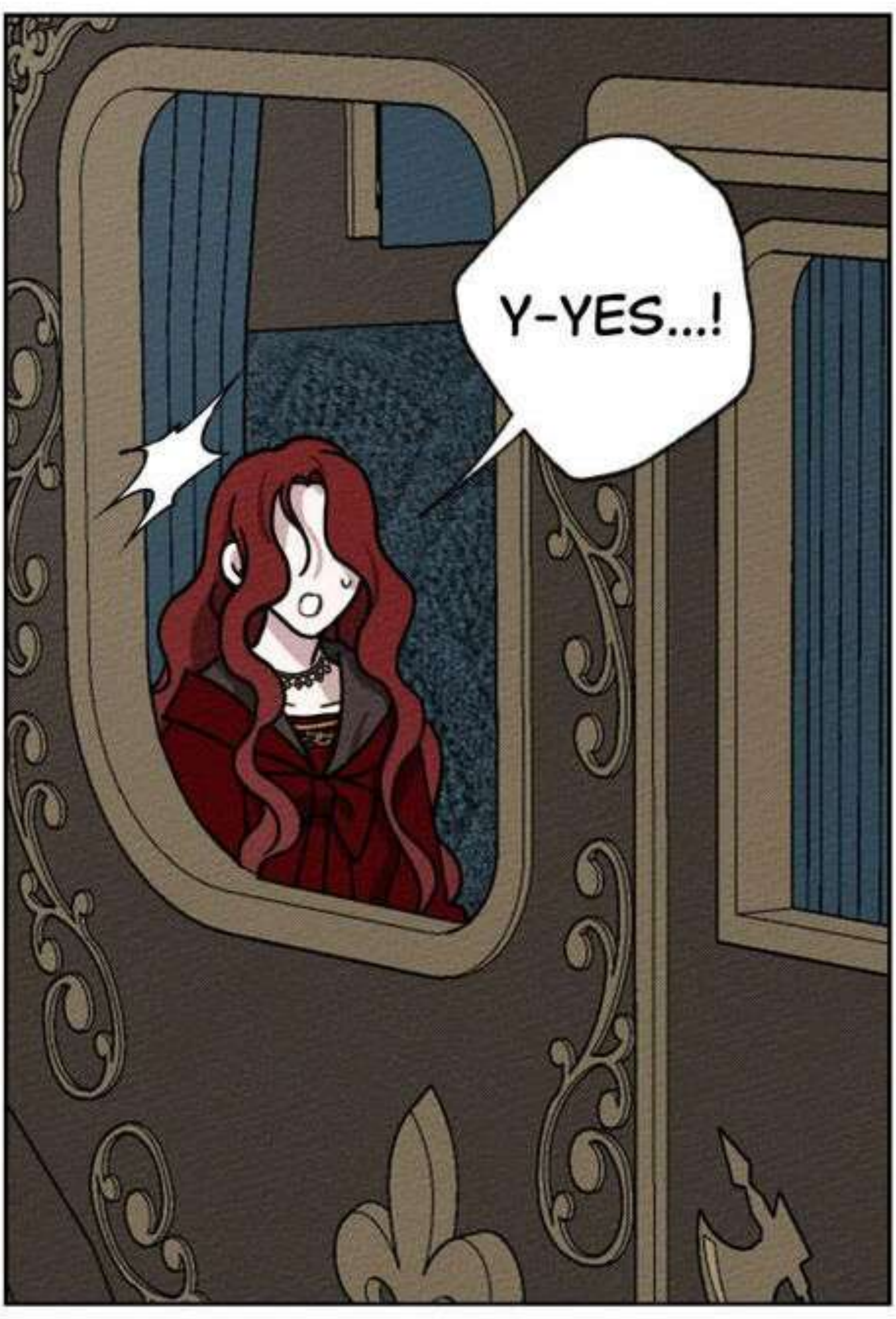

JUST BEAR WITH THE PAIN A LITTLE LONGER.
WE'LL REACH A WATCHTOWER SOON, AND YOU CAN REST THERE FOR A WHILE.

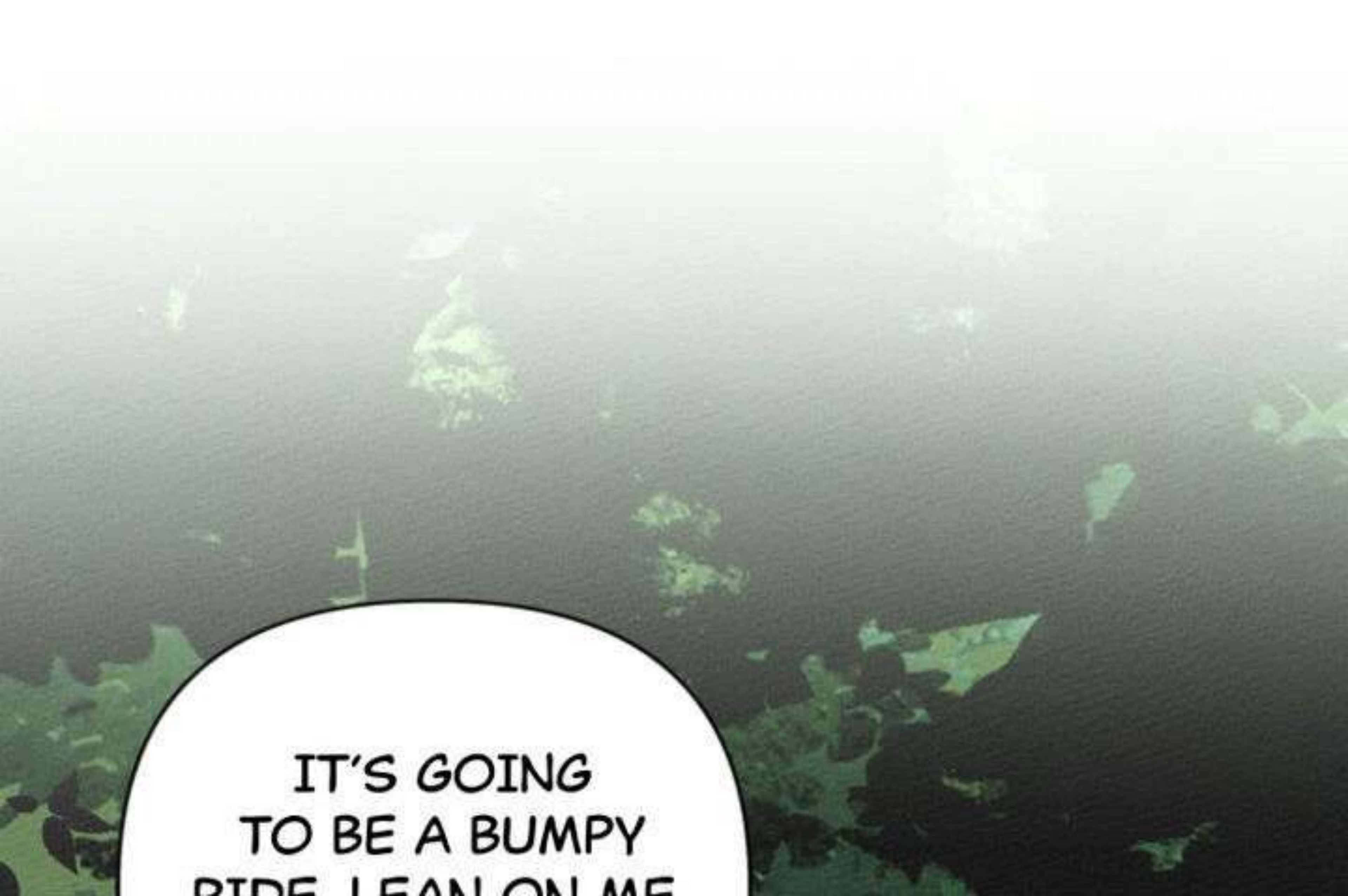

SNICKER
WHAT, DONE SO SOON, SIR?
WHEW!
SNICKER
MOVE IT! STOP LAZING ABOUT!

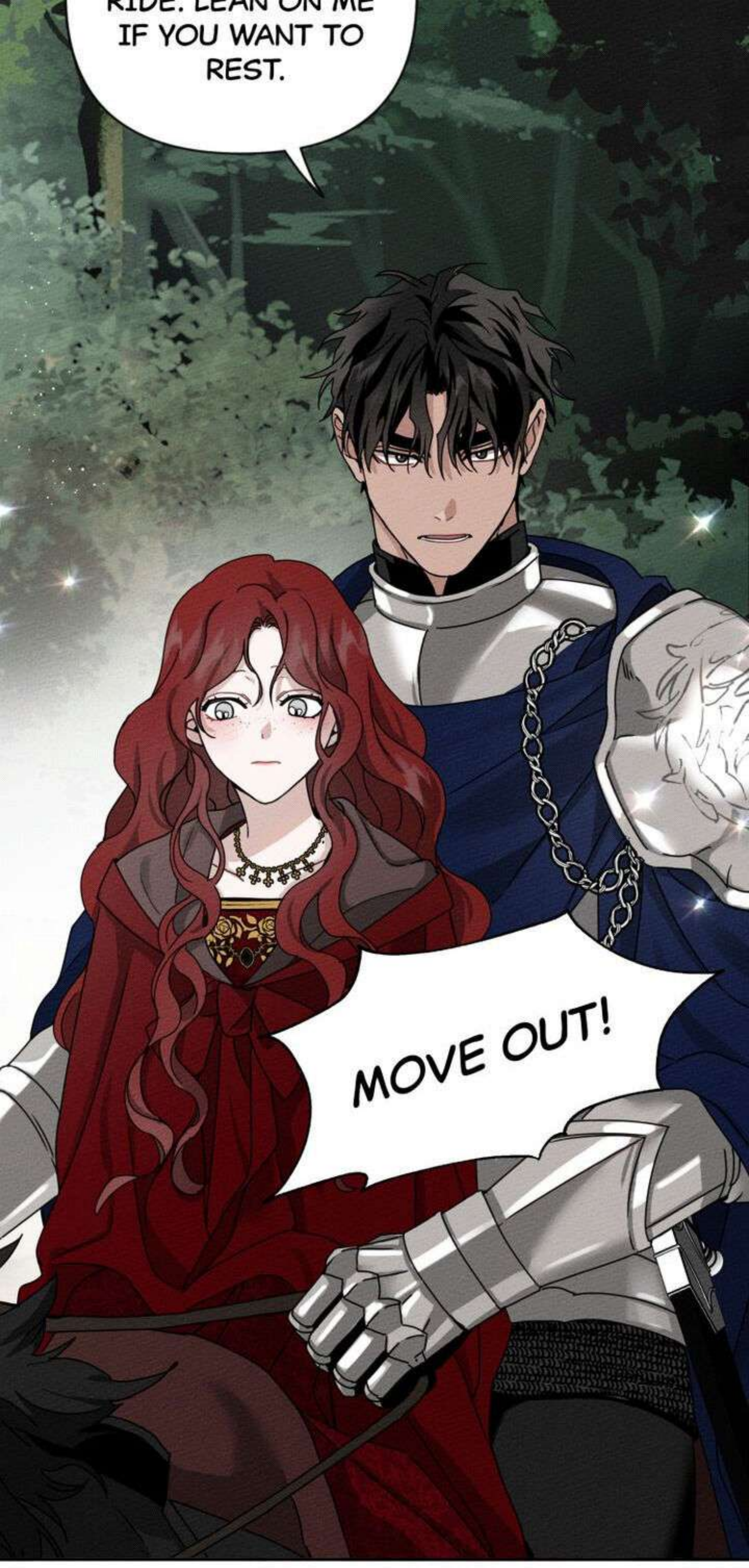
SO HE WASN'T
ANNOYED
WITH ME...
WHAT
A RELIEF.

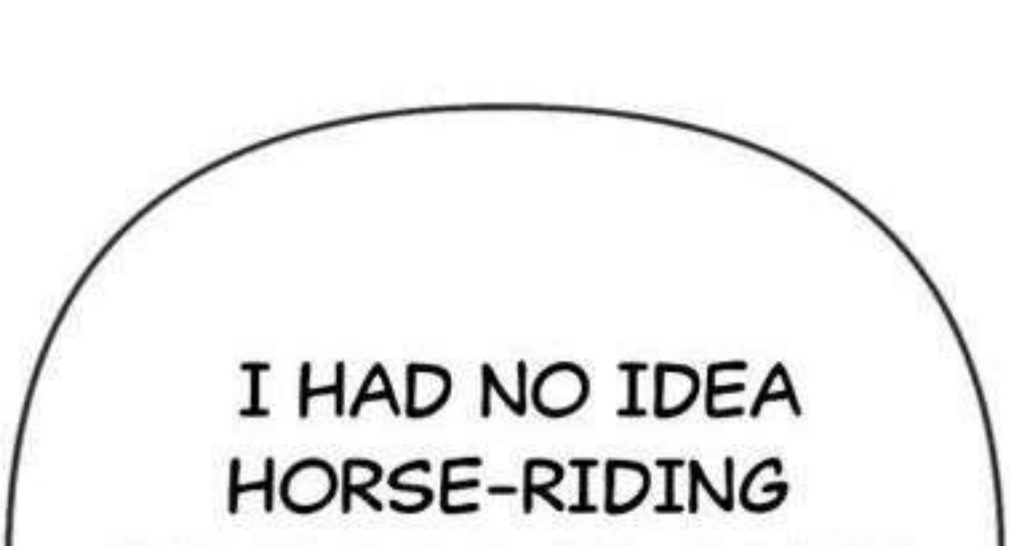
THE WEATHER ISN'T

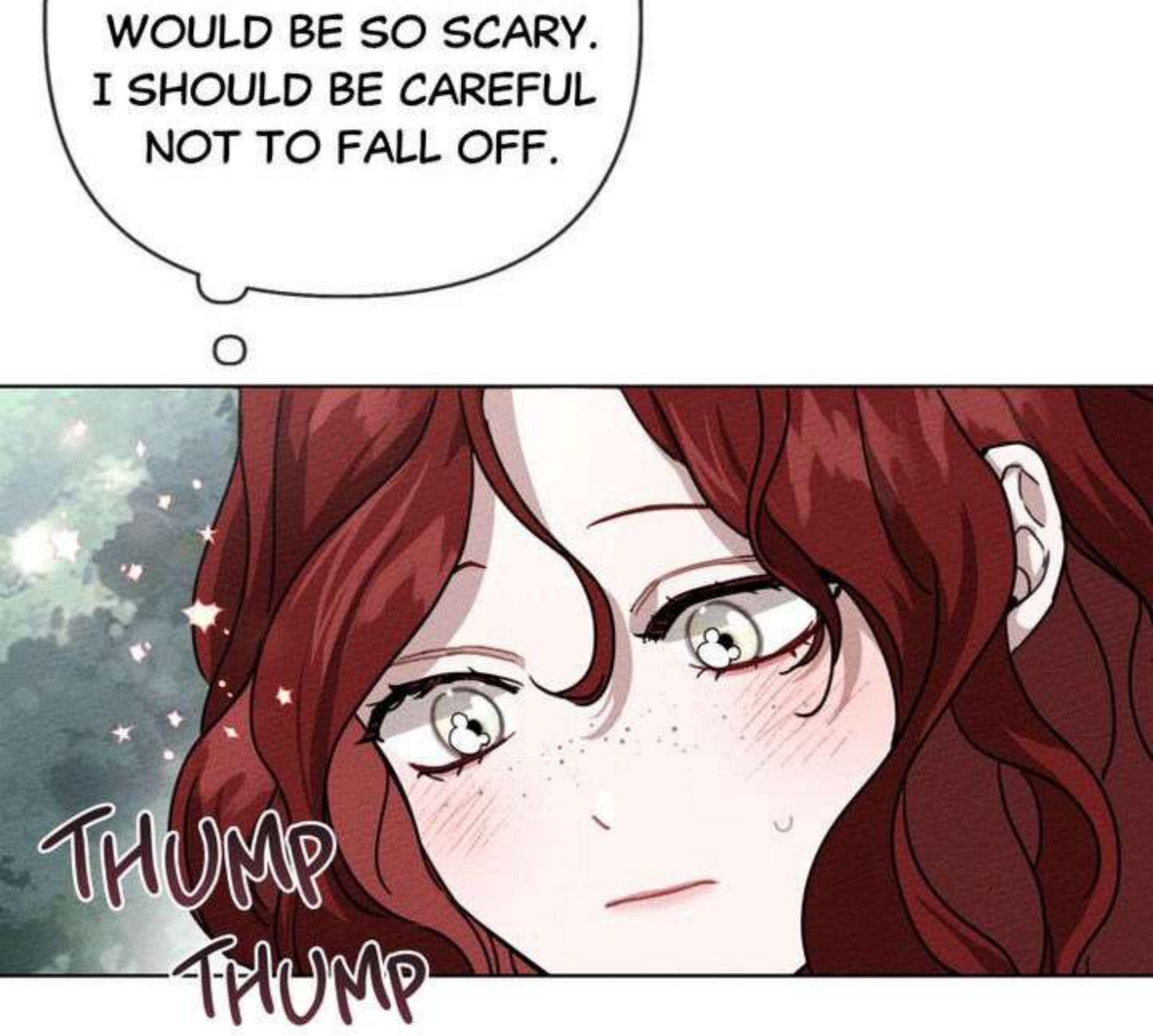

THE WEATHER ISN'T LOOKING TOO GOOD, SO WE'LL HAVE TO TAKE A SHORTCUT TO REACH ANATOL BEFORE SUNDOWN.
WE CAN'T TAKE THE CARRIAGE, SO YOU'LL HAVE TO RIDE WITH ME. WILL THAT BE ALL RIGHT?

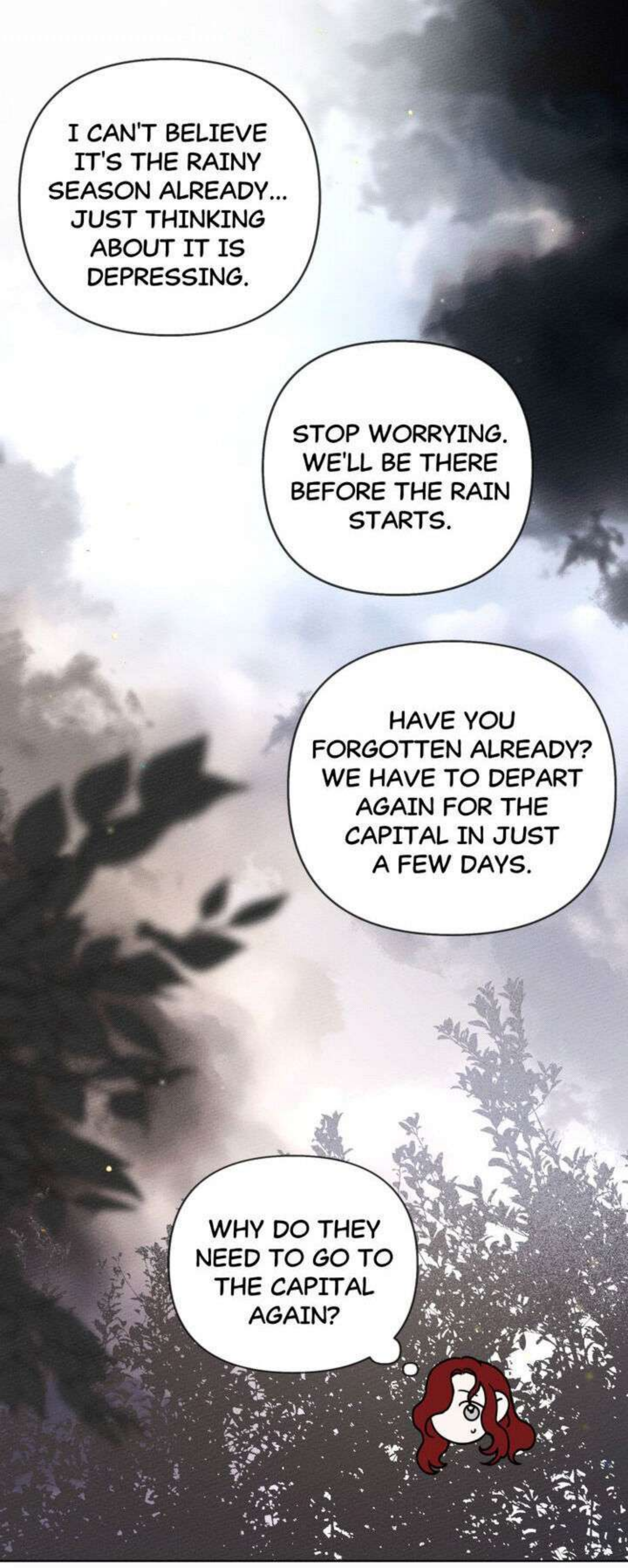

Y-YES...!

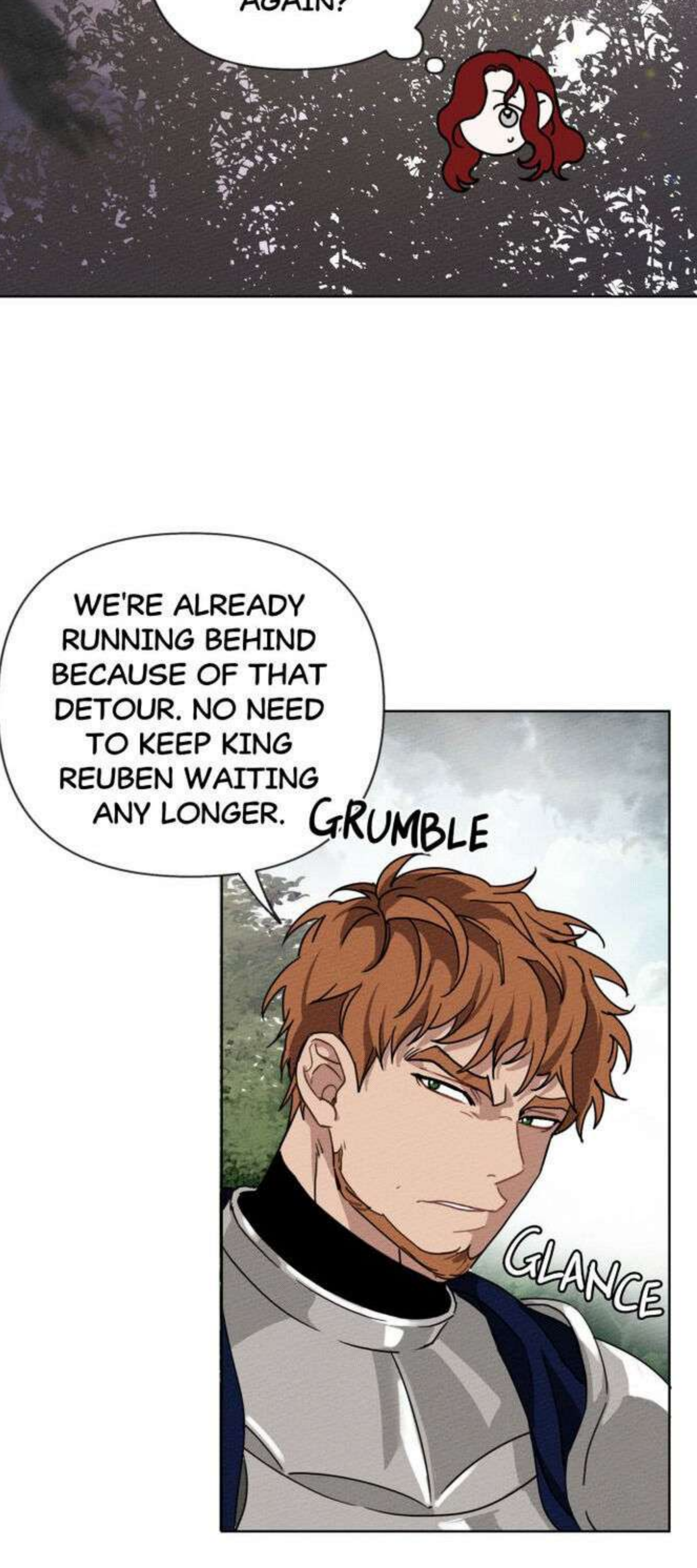

IT'S GOING TO BE A BUMPY RIDE. LEAN ON ME


RIDE. LEAN ON ME IF YOU WANT TO REST.
MOVE OUT!

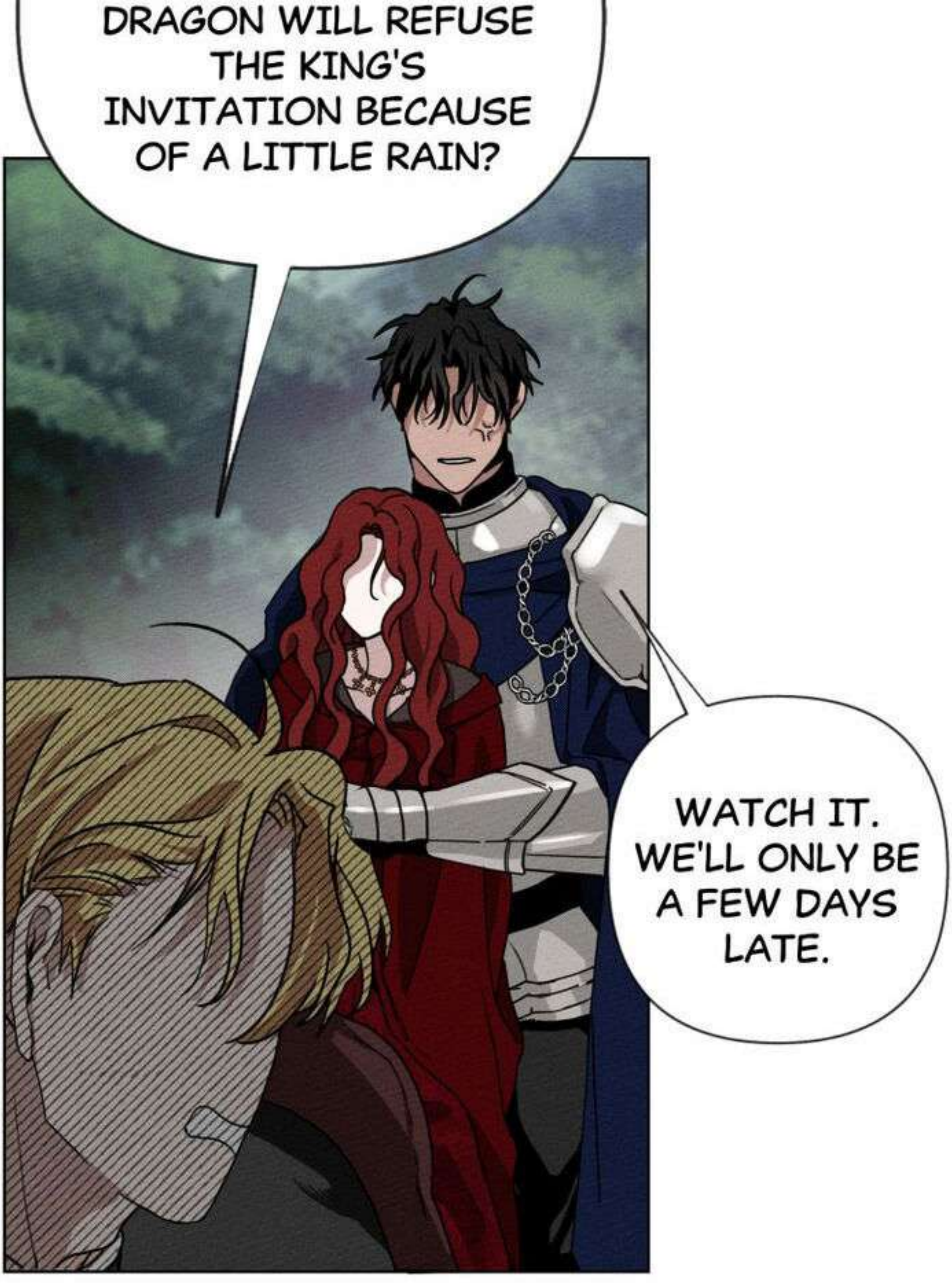

I HAD NO IDEA HORSE-RIDING WOULD BE SO SCARY. I SHOULD BE CAREFUL NOT TO FALL OFF.


THUMP THUMP


I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S THE RAINY SEASON ALREADY... JUST THINKING ABOUT IT IS DEPRESSING.
STOP WORRYING. WE'LL BE THERE BEFORE THE RAIN STARTS.
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ALREADY? WE HAVE TO DEPART AGAIN FOR THE CAPITAL IN JUST A FEW DAYS.
WHY DO THEY NEED TO GO TO THE CAPITAL AGAIN?

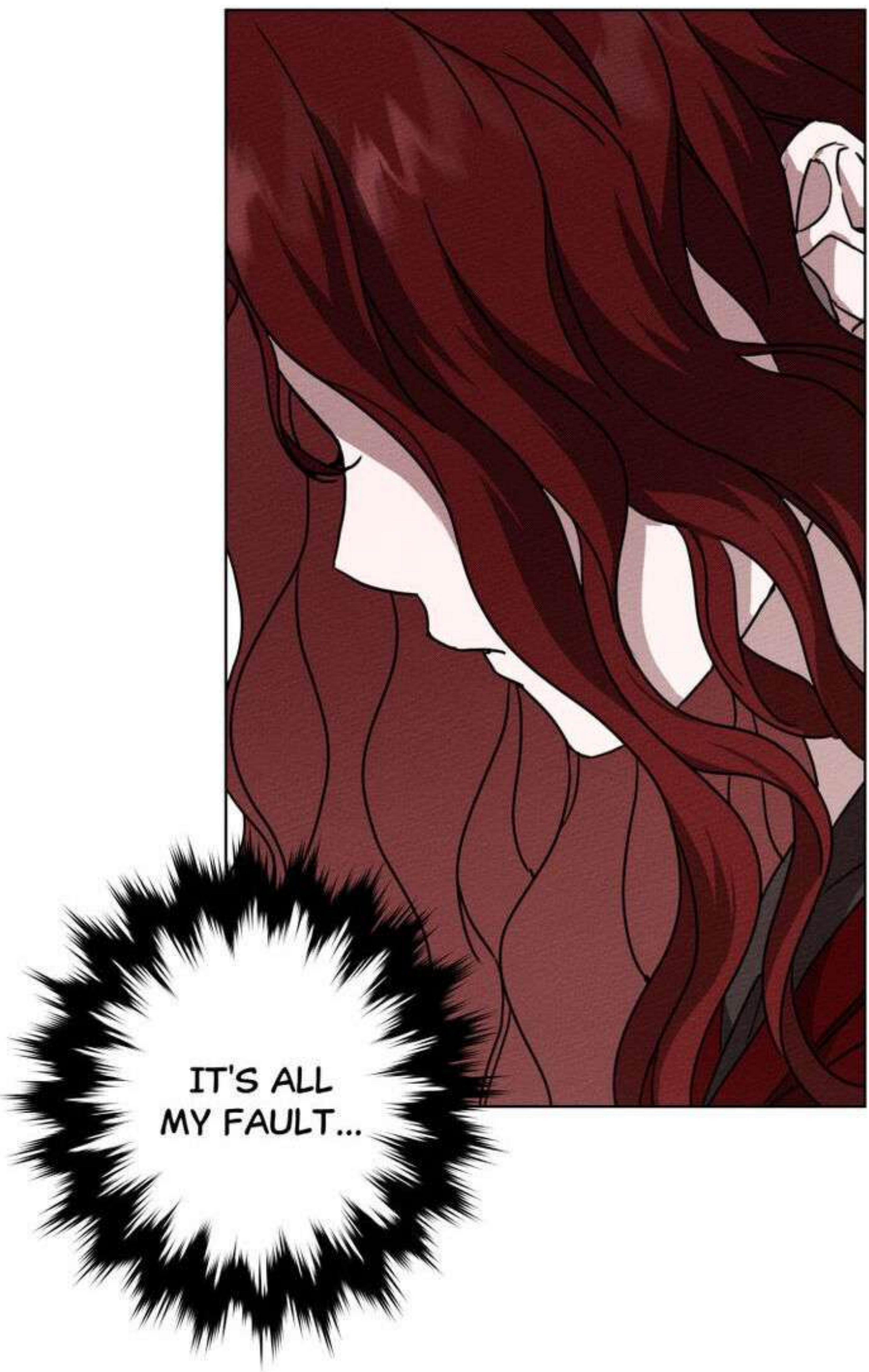

WE'RE ALREADY RUNNING BEHIND BECAUSE OF THAT DETOUR. NO NEED TO KEEP KING REUBEN WAITING ANY LONGER.
GRUMBLE
GLANCE

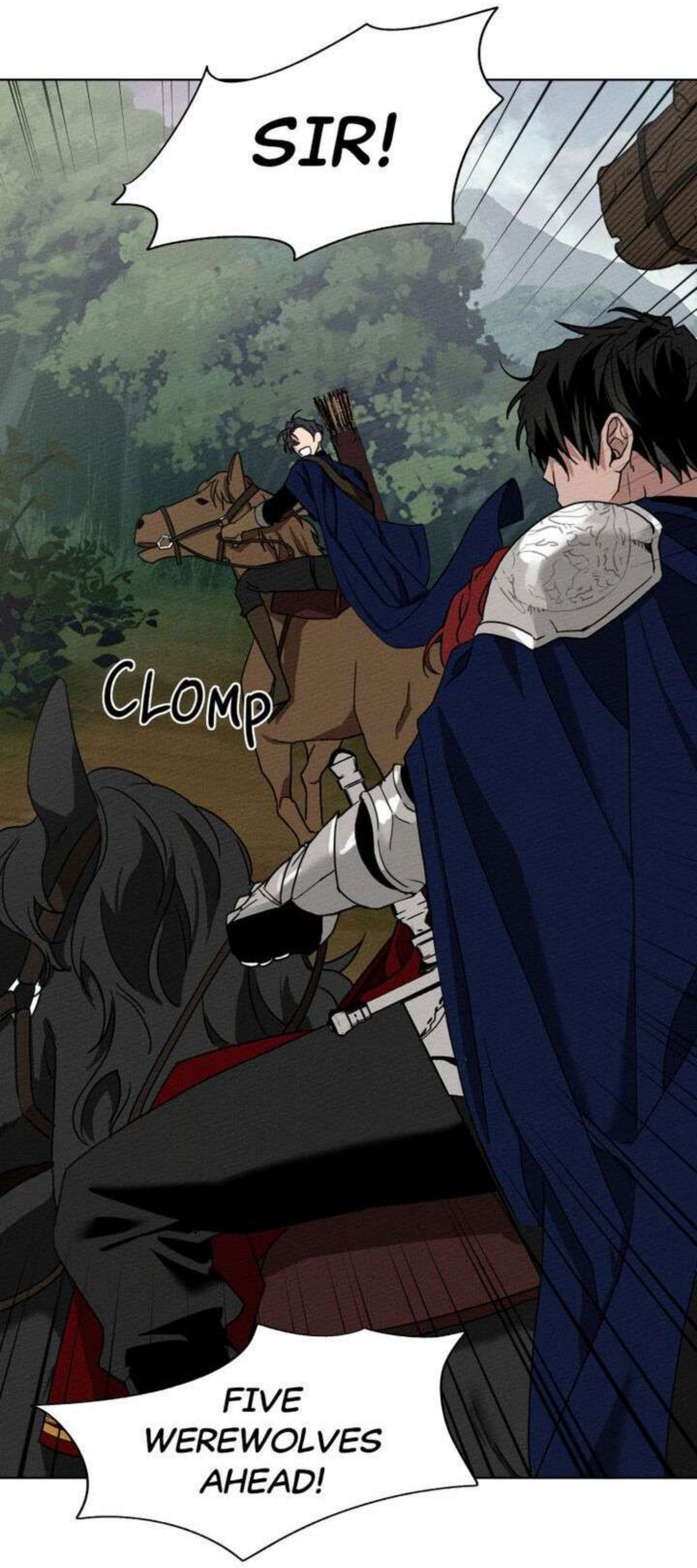
SLUMP
BRINGING ME ALONG REALLY DID SLOW THEM DOWN...
NOT MUCH WE CAN DO ABOUT IT ONCE THE MONSOON STARTS.
BUT SIR!
ARE YOU TELLING ME THE HERO WHO DEFEATED THE GREAT

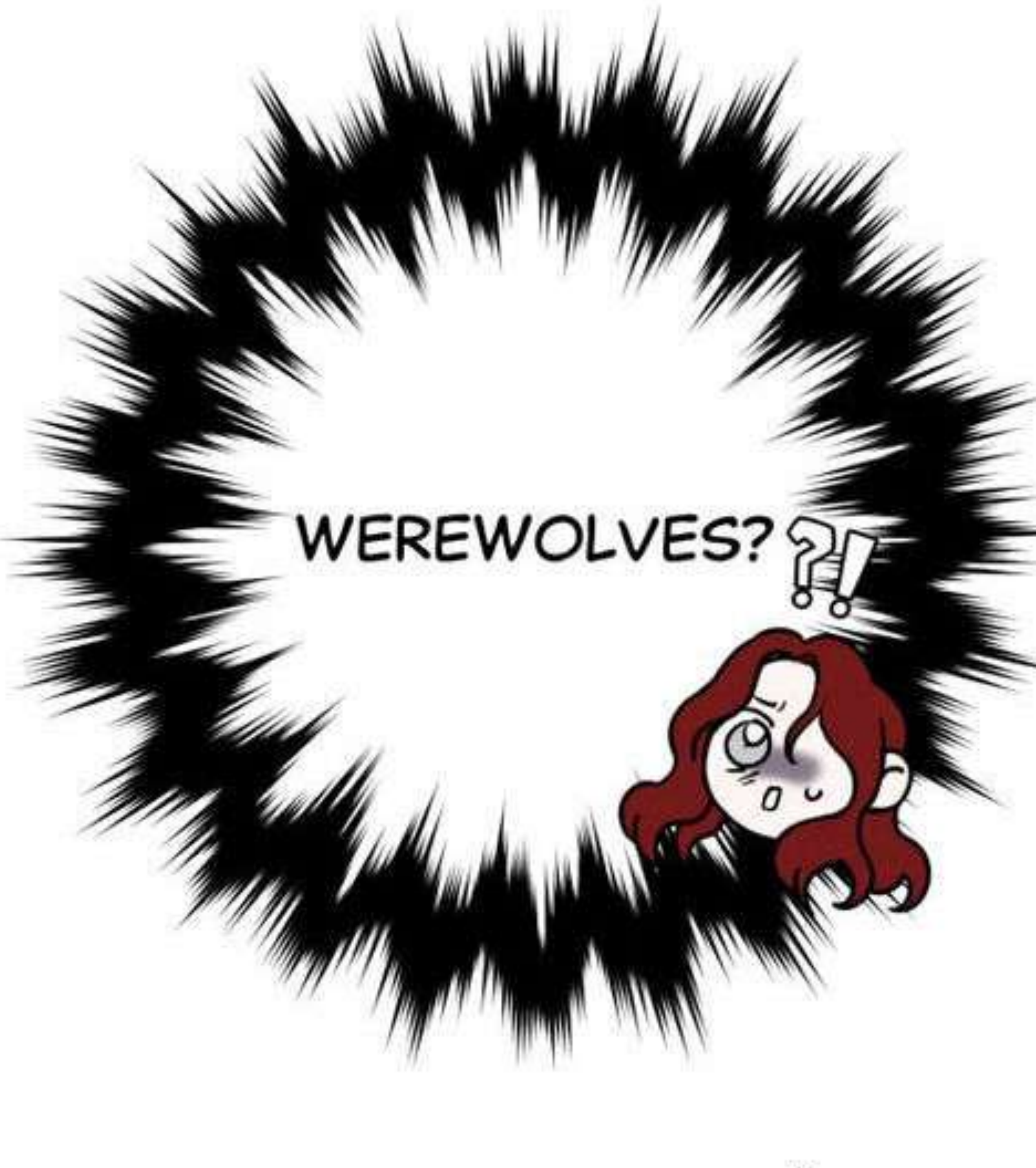

DRAGON WILL REFUSE THE KING'S INVITATION BECAUSE OF A LITTLE RAIN?
WATCH IT. WE'LL ONLY BE A FEW DAYS LATE.

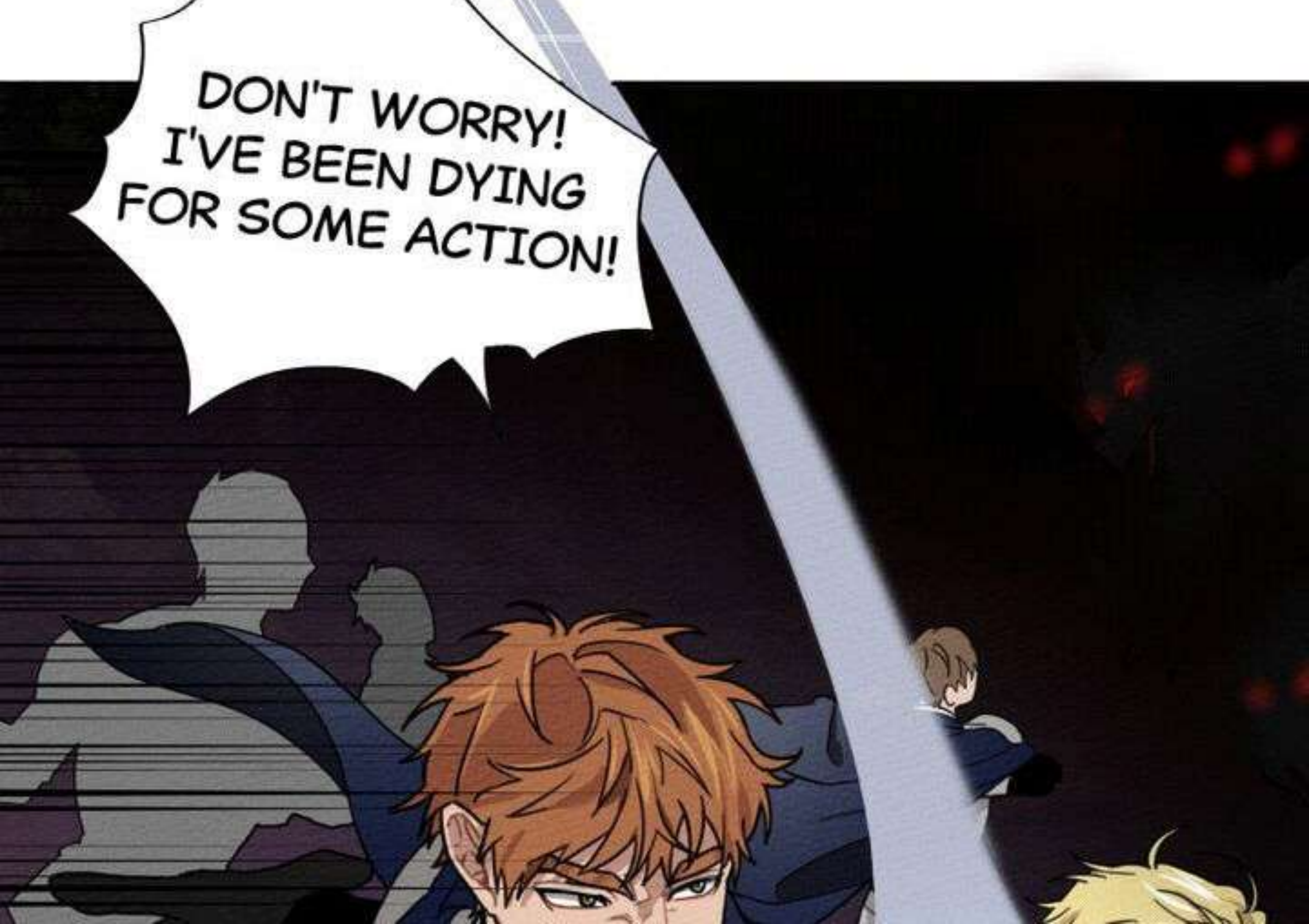
WE'VE WASTED ENOUGH TIME! IF WE KEEP THE KING WAITING—

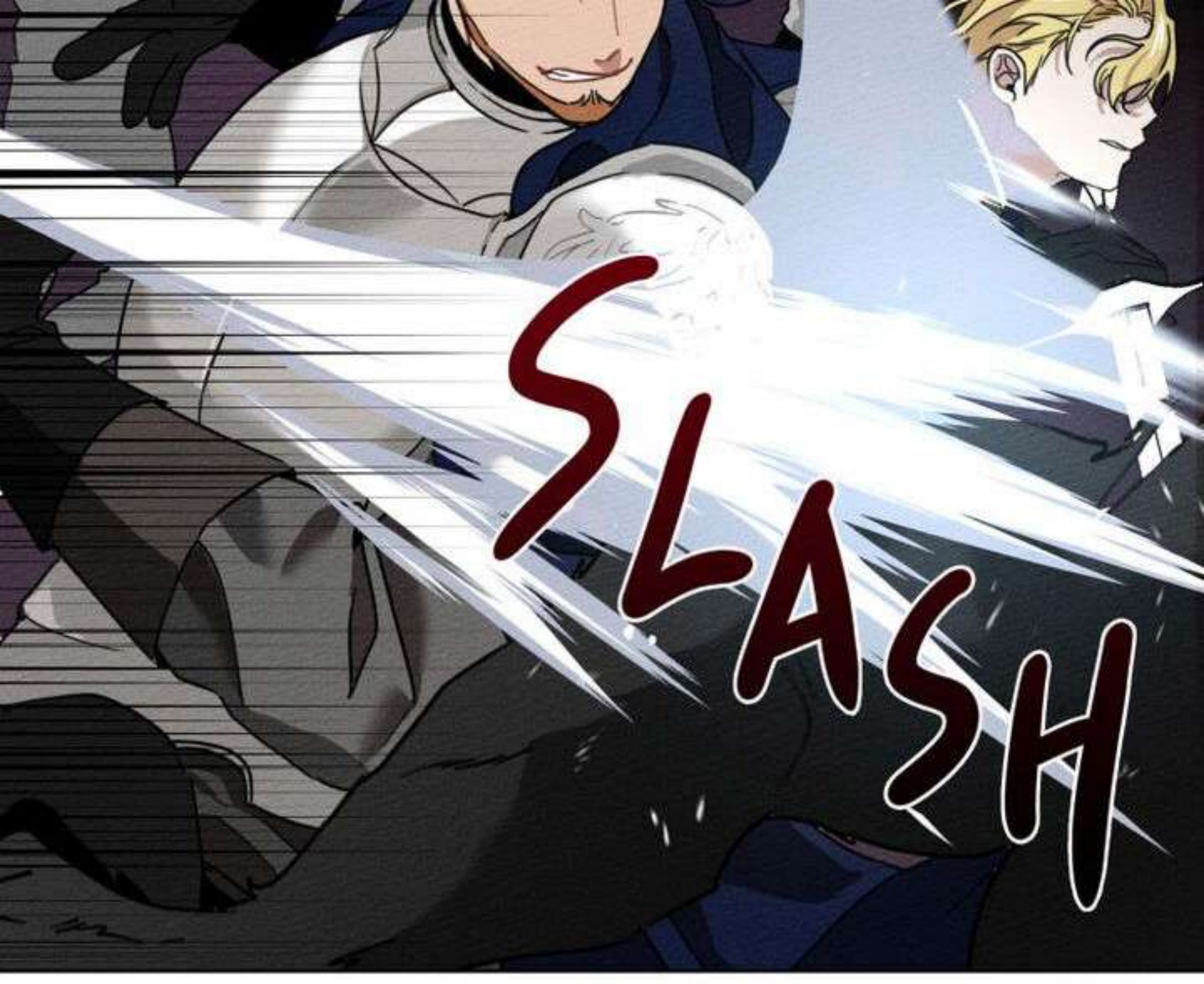
URSULINE RICAYDO, WATCH YOUR MOUTH.

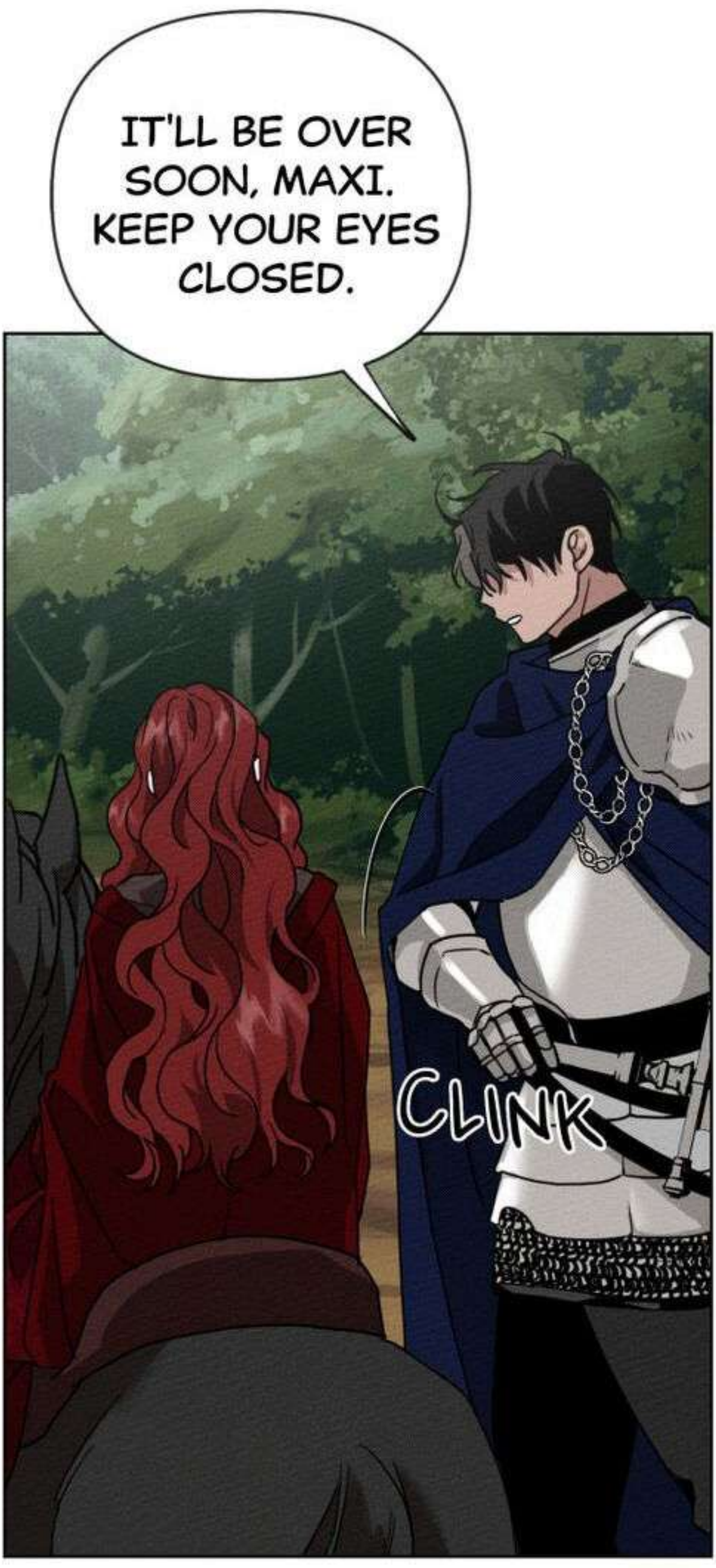

IT'S ALL MY FAULT...

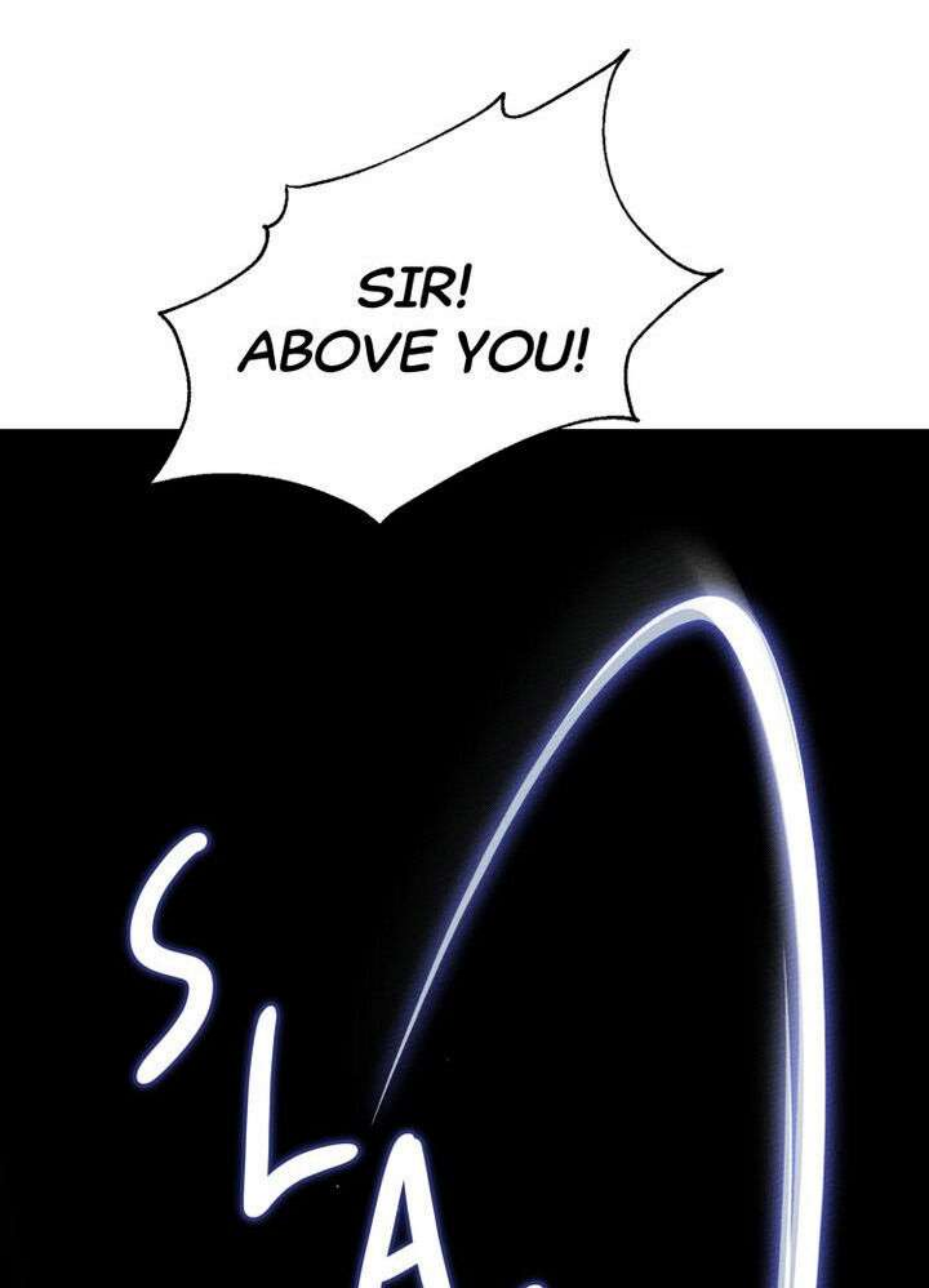

SIR!
CLOMP
FIVE WEREWOLVES AHEAD!


WEREWOLVES?⁈

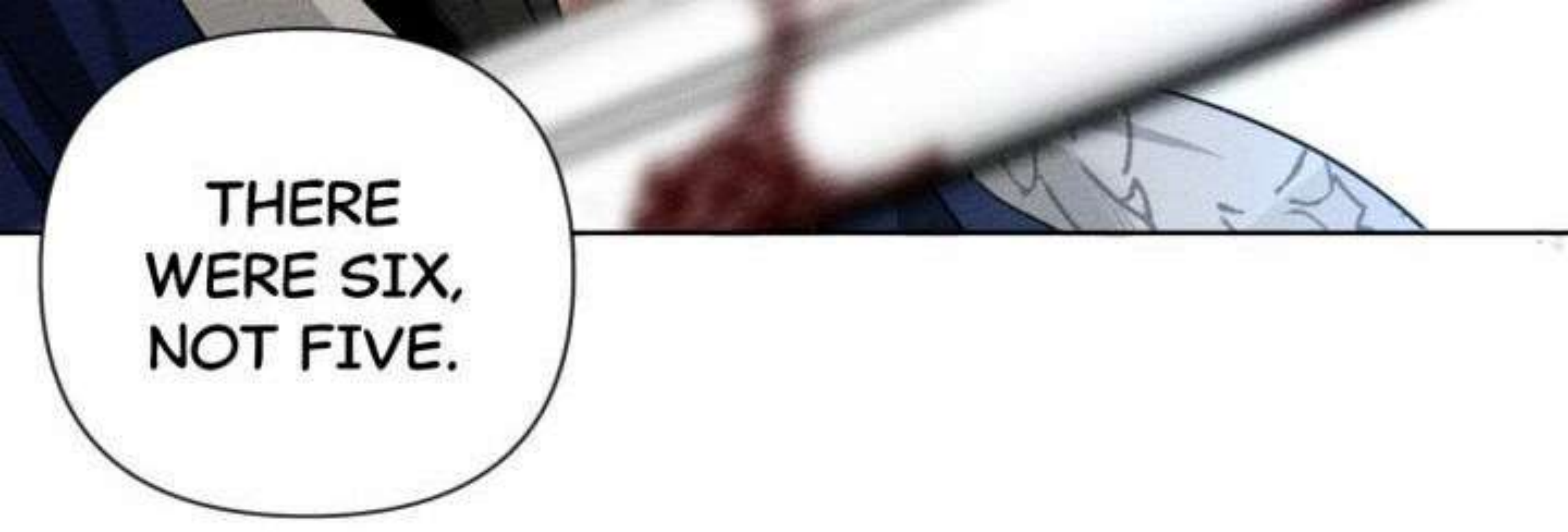

DON'T LET THEM GET ANY CLOSER!
DON'T WORRY! I'VE BEEN DYING FOR SOME ACTION!

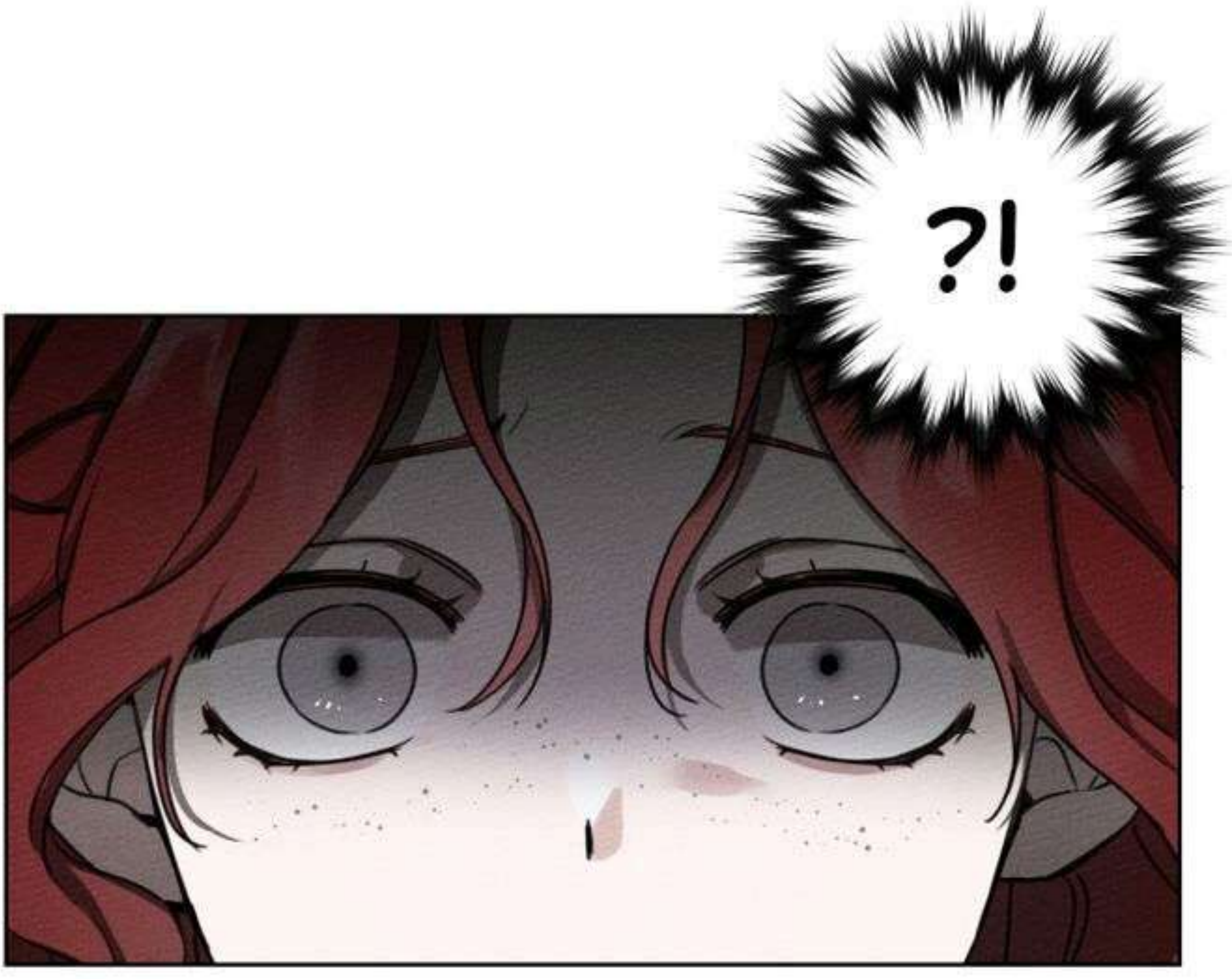

SLASH

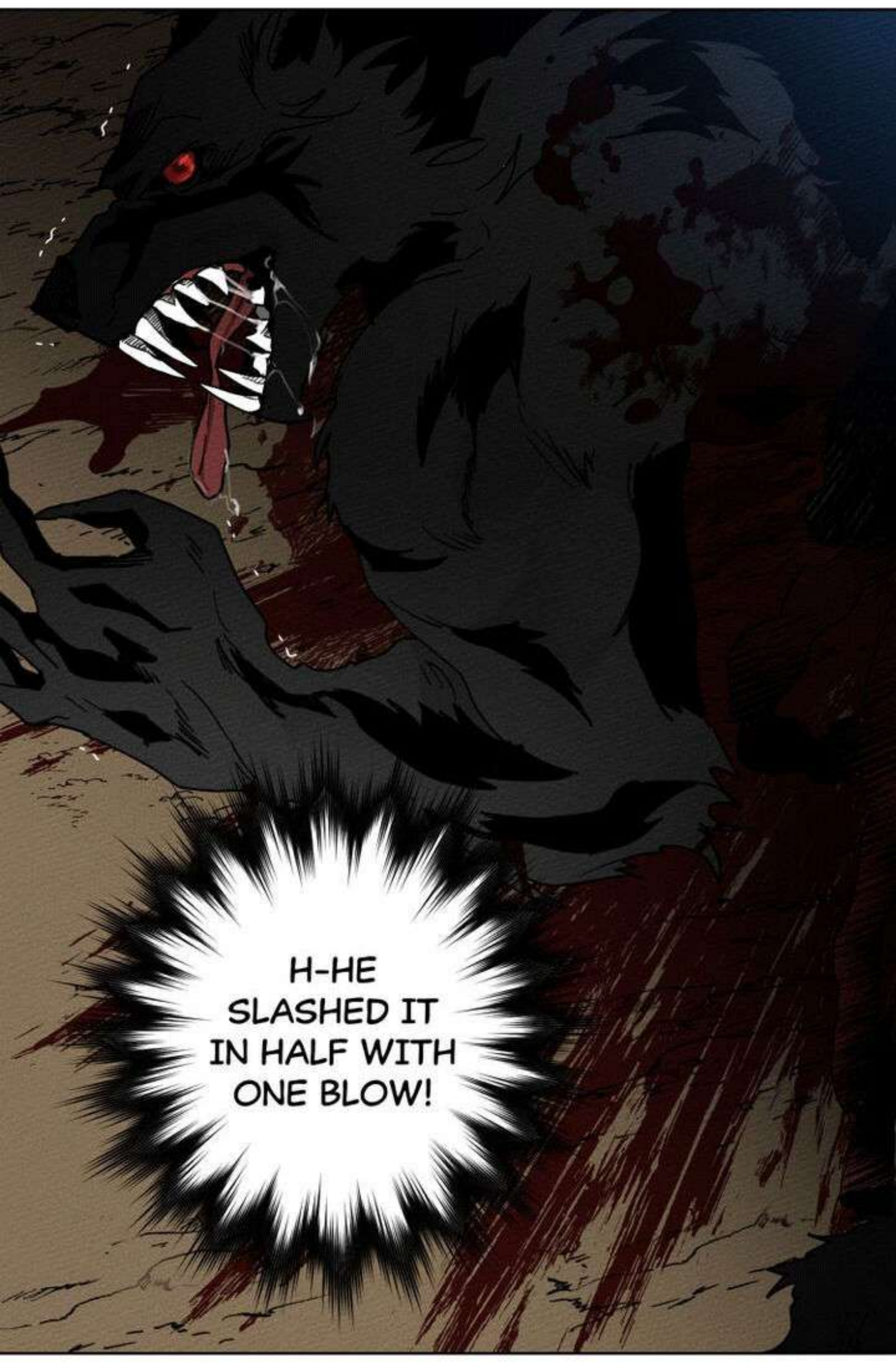

IT'LL BE OVER SOON, MAXI. KEEP YOUR EYES CLOSED.
CLINK

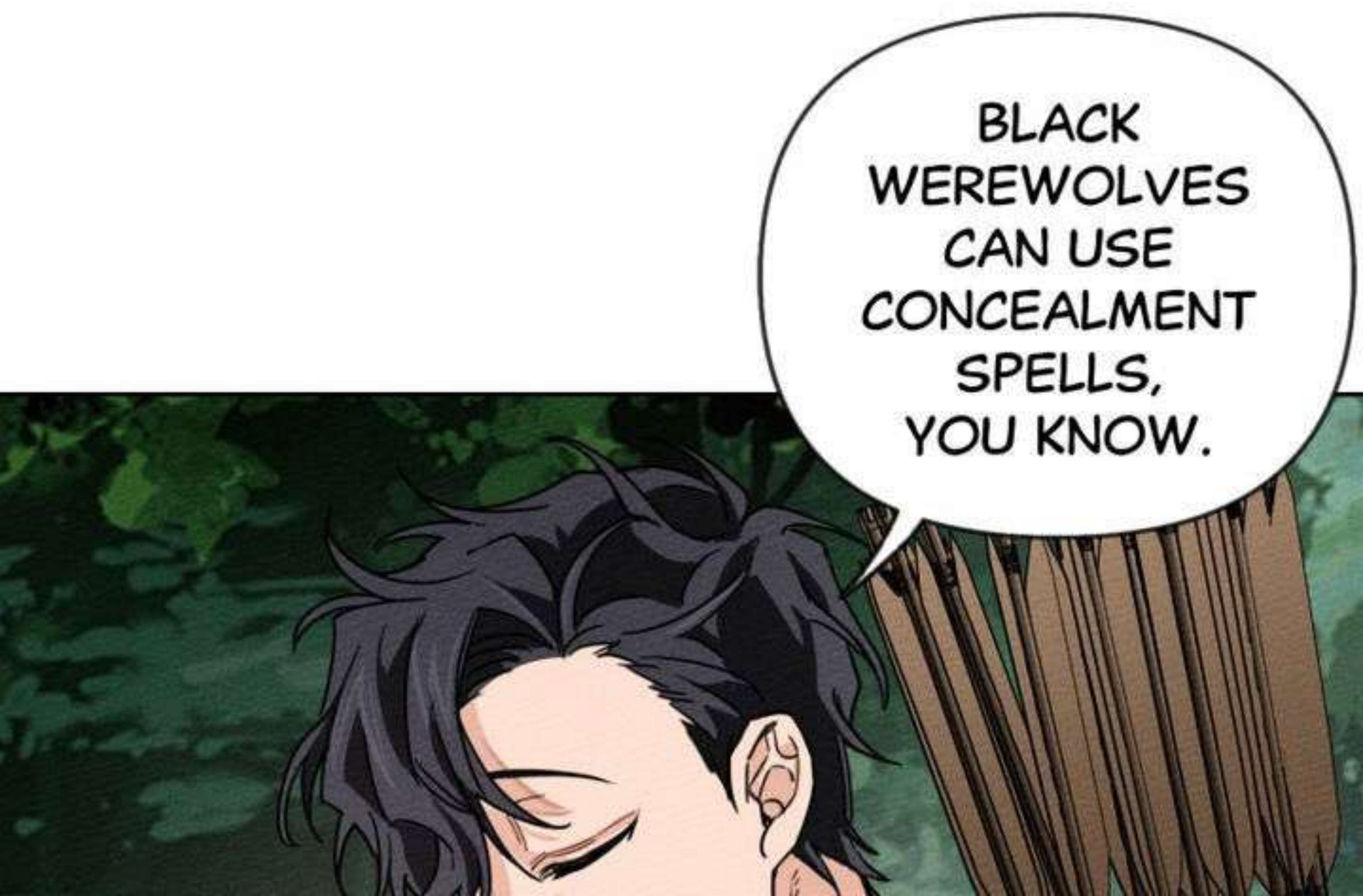

SIR! ABOVE YOU!
SLA

SH
THUD
GABEL,


THERE WERE SIX, NOT FIVE.

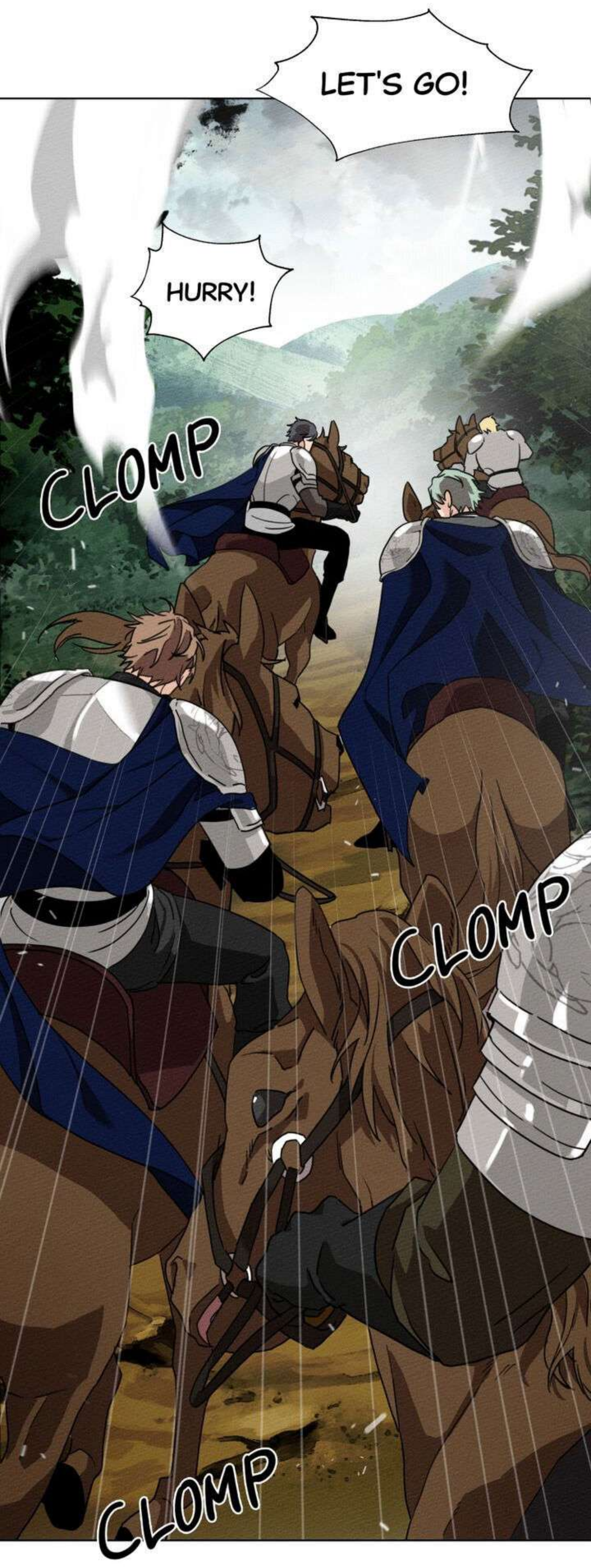

?!

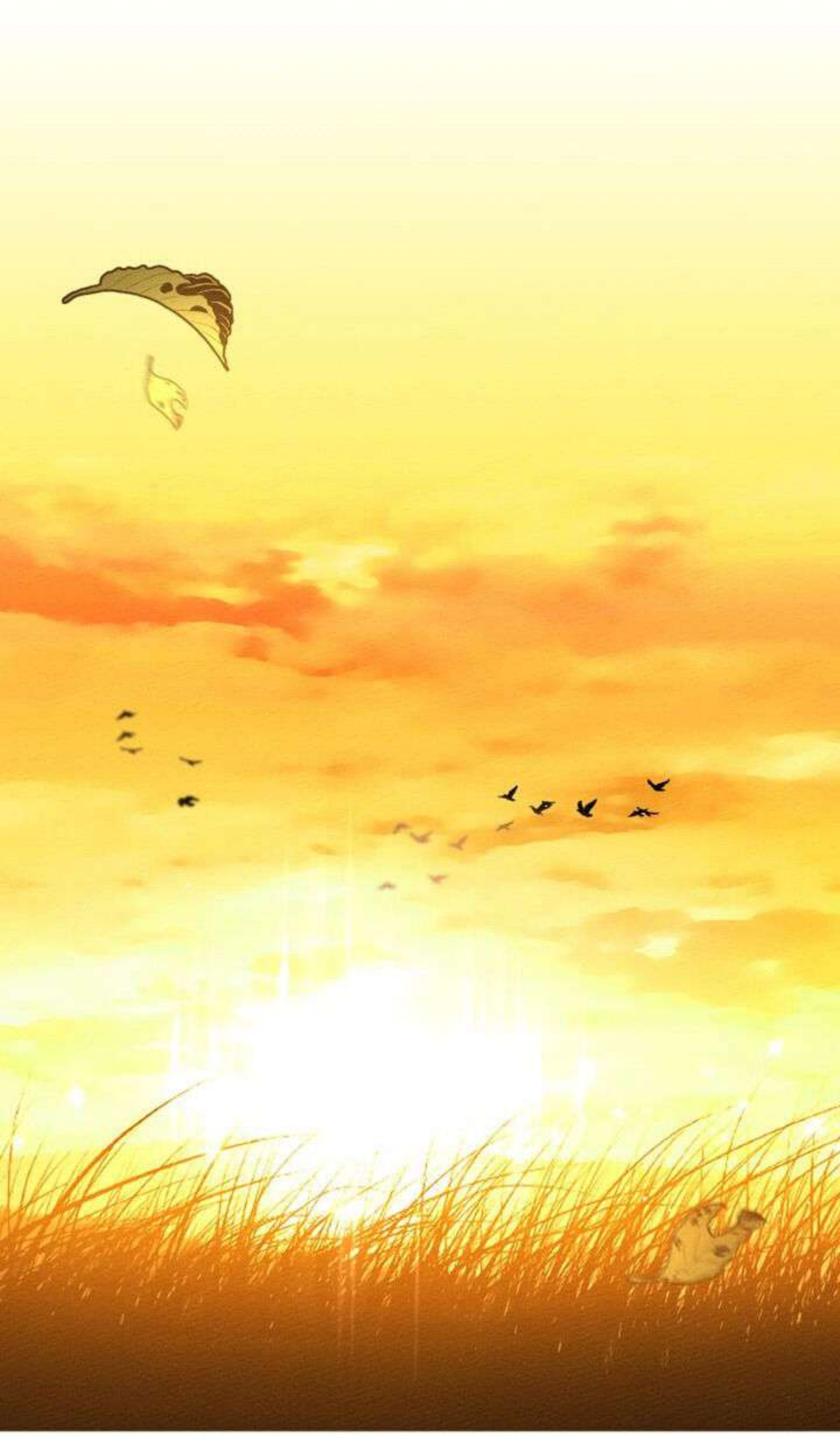

H-HE SLASHED IT IN HALF WITH ONE BLOW!

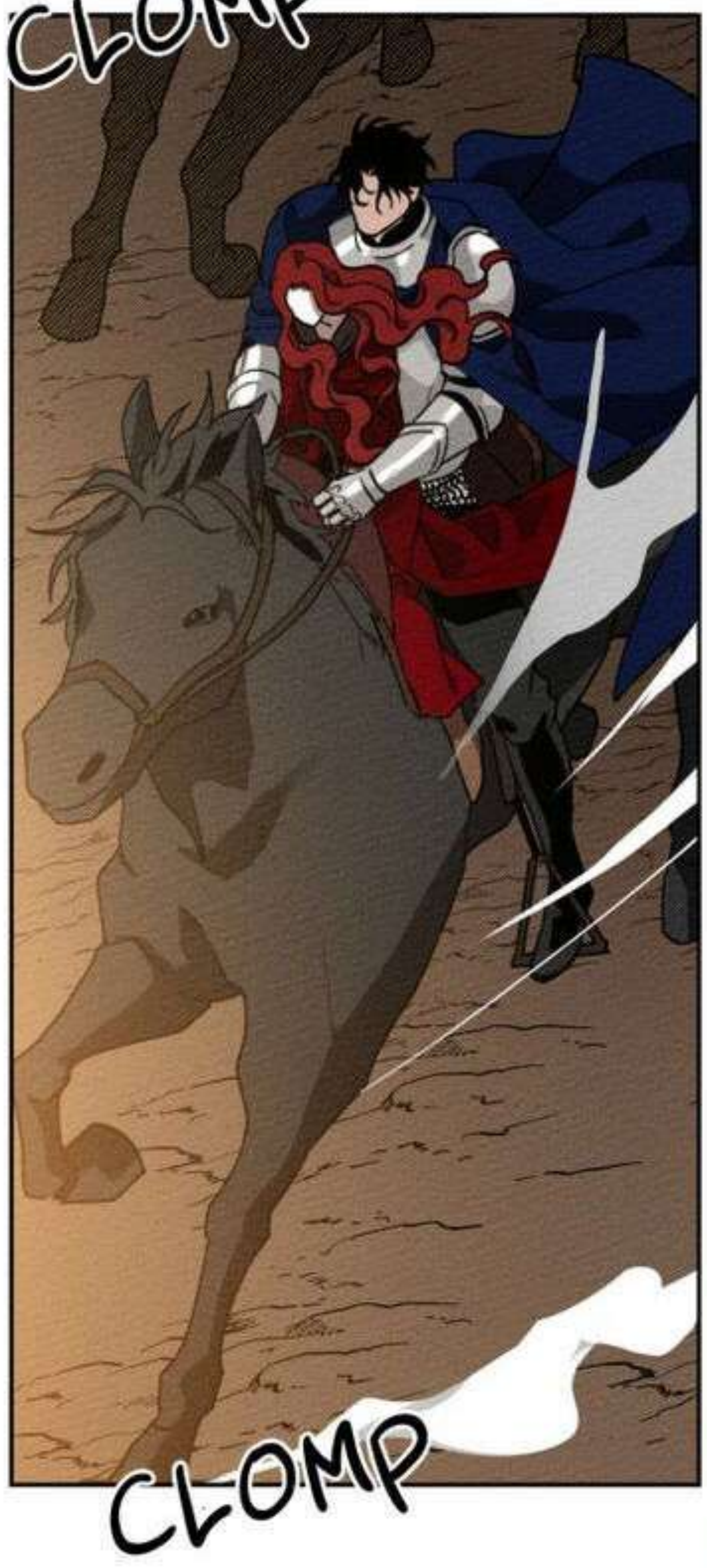

BLACK WEREWOLVES CAN USE CONCEALMENT SPELLS, YOU KNOW.

HAA
LET'S HURRY. THERE COULD BE MORE.

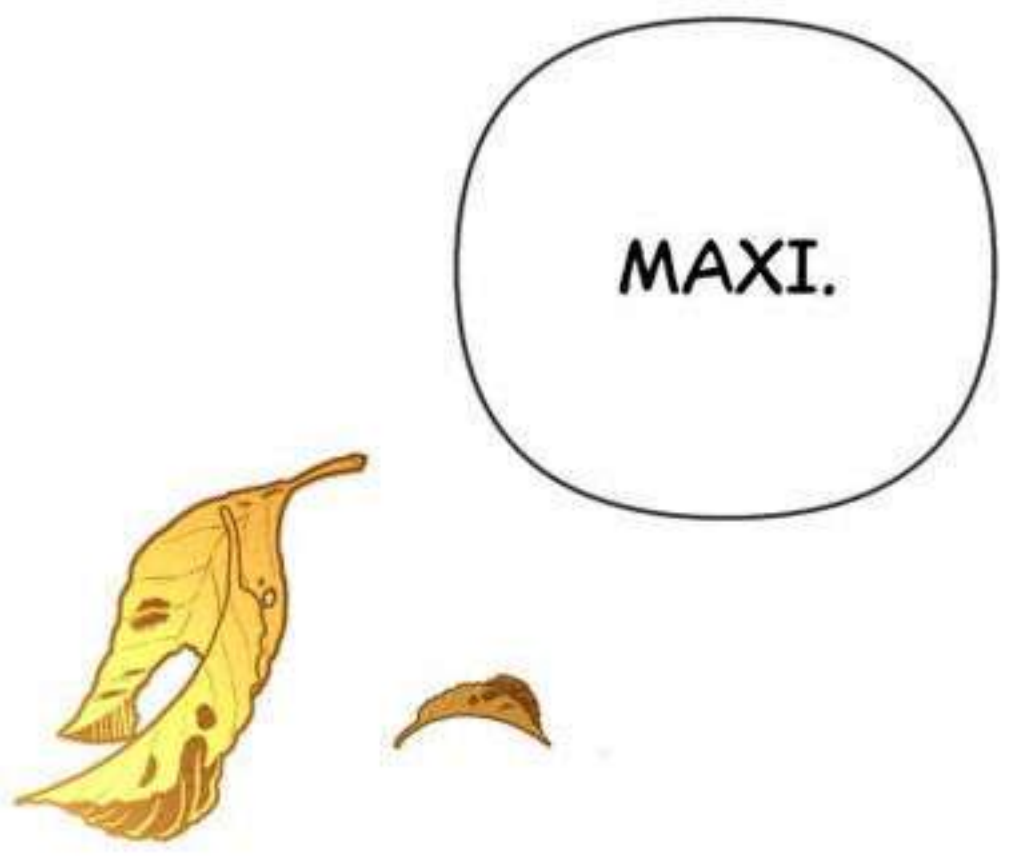
HOLD ON TIGHT. WE'RE MOVING INTO A GALLOP.

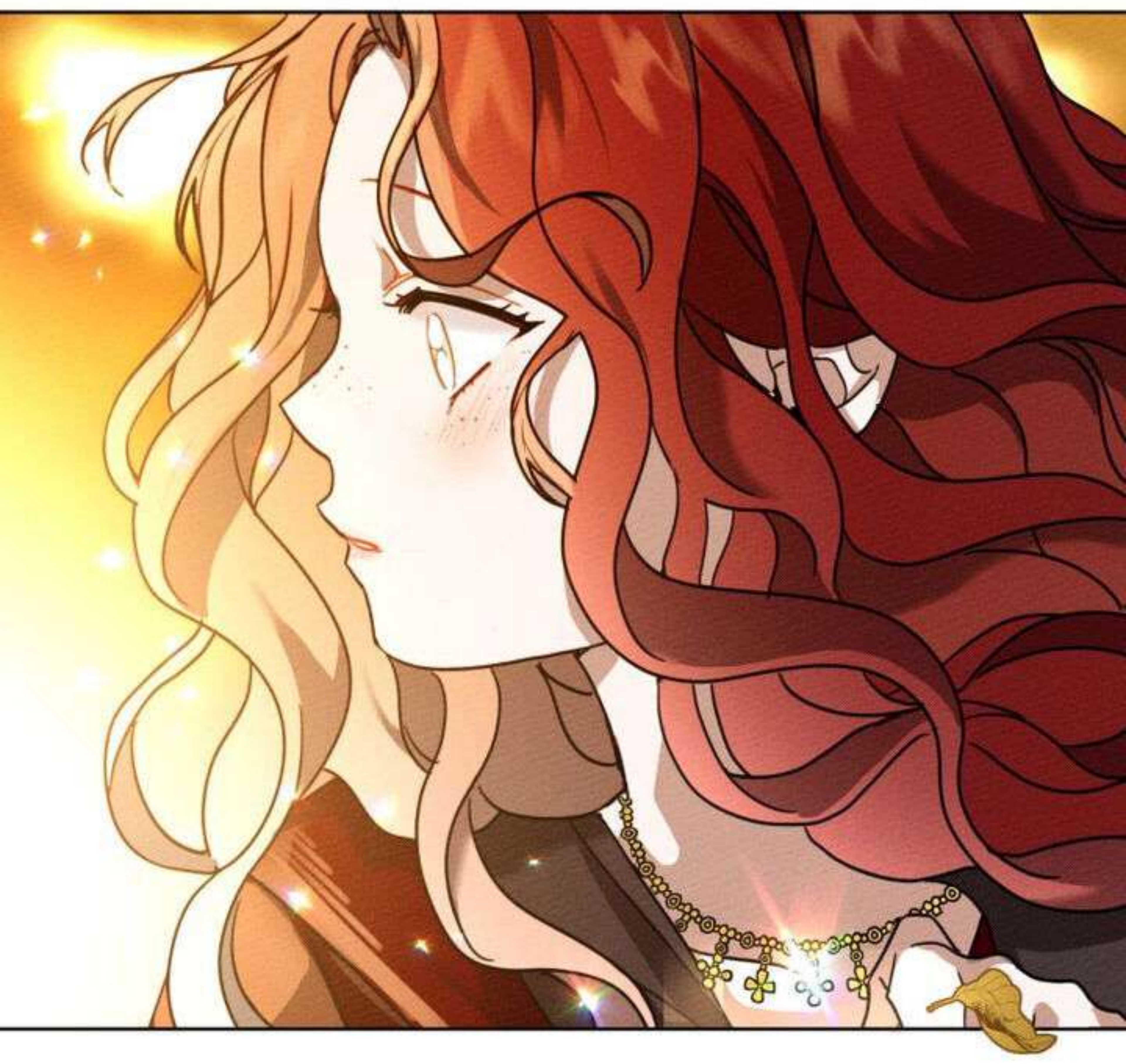

LET'S GO!
HURRY!
CLOMP
CLOMP
CLOMP

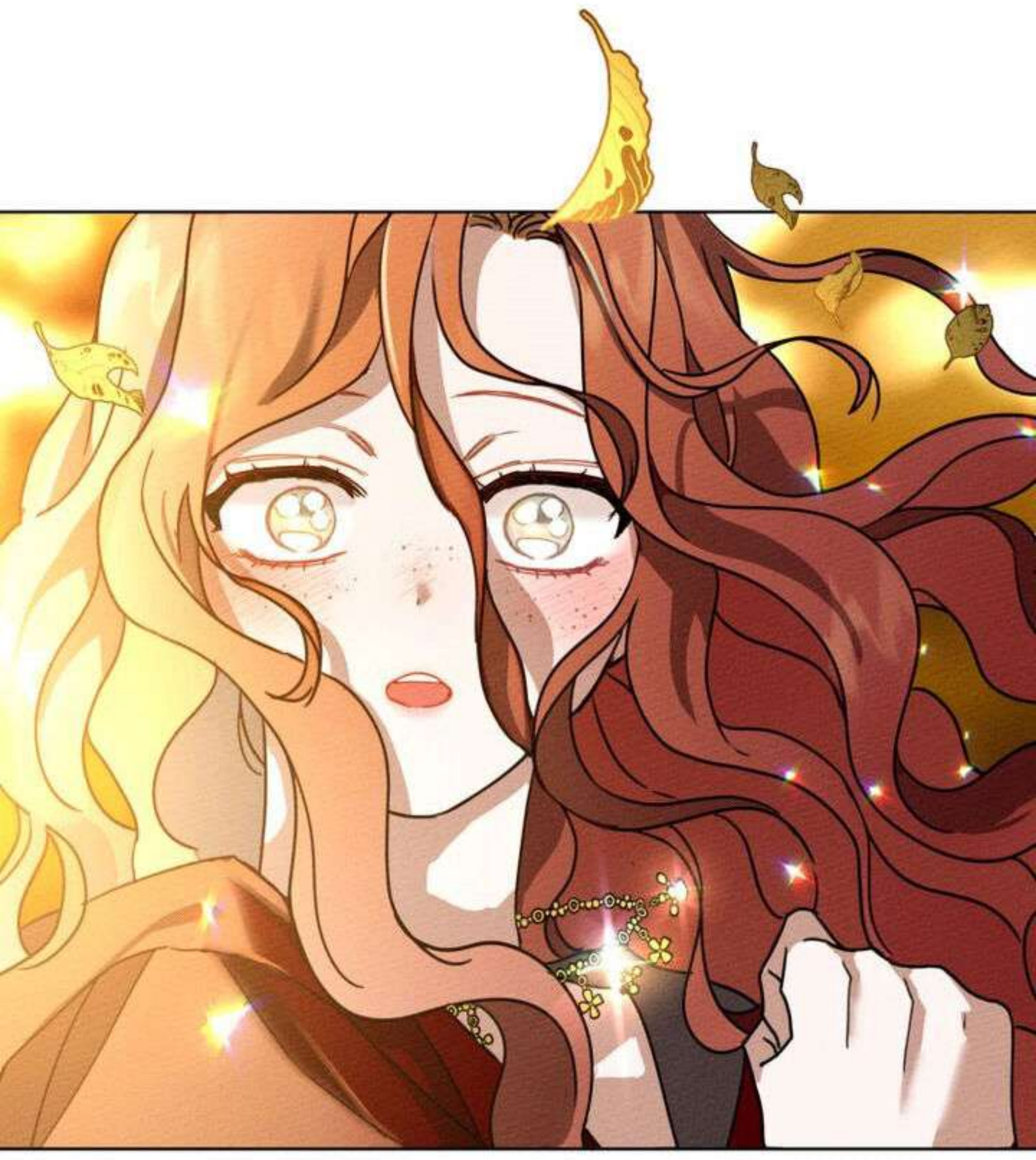


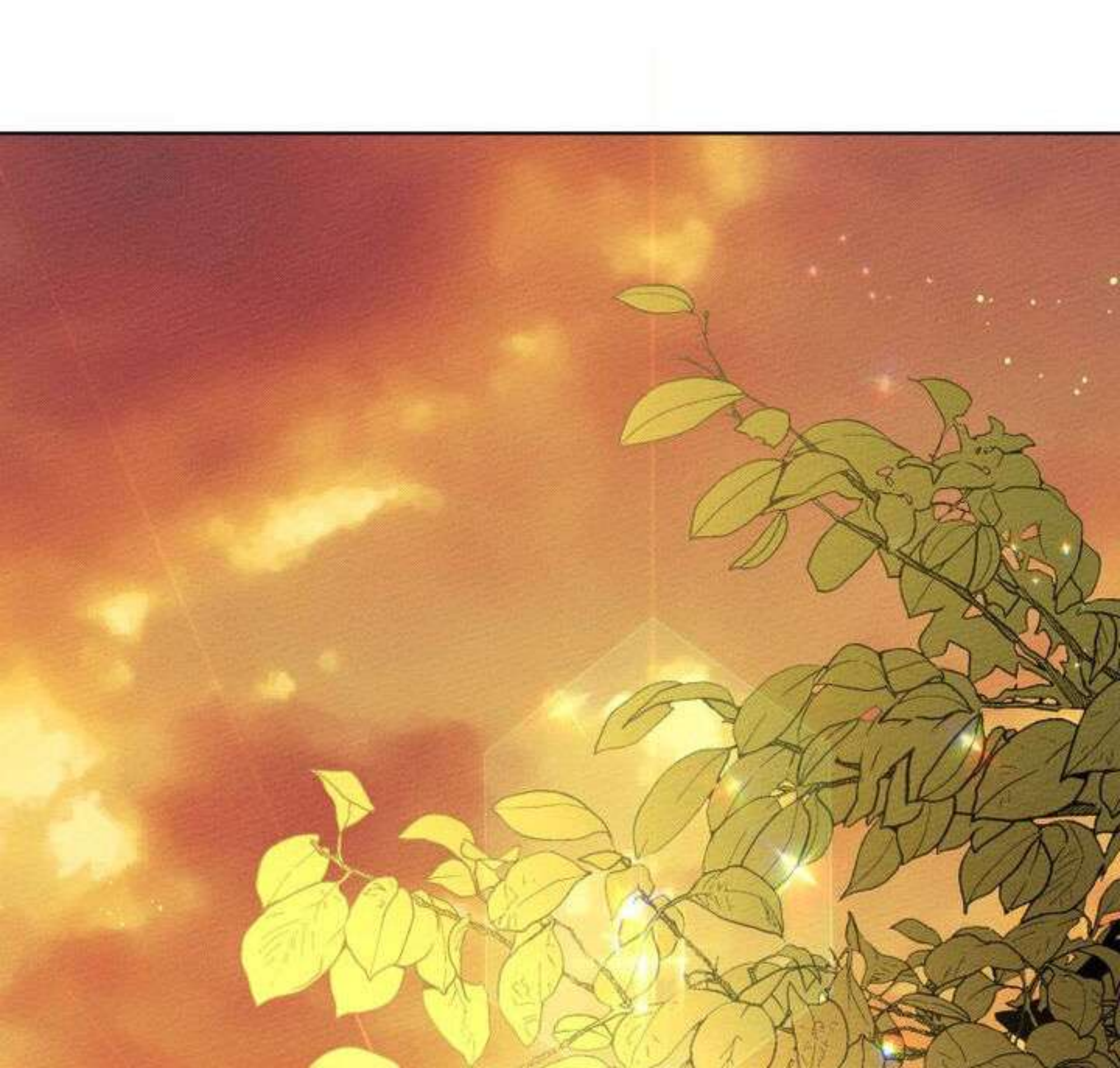

CLOMP
CLOMP

EASY.


MAXI.







THAT IS MY LAND.
ANATOL.

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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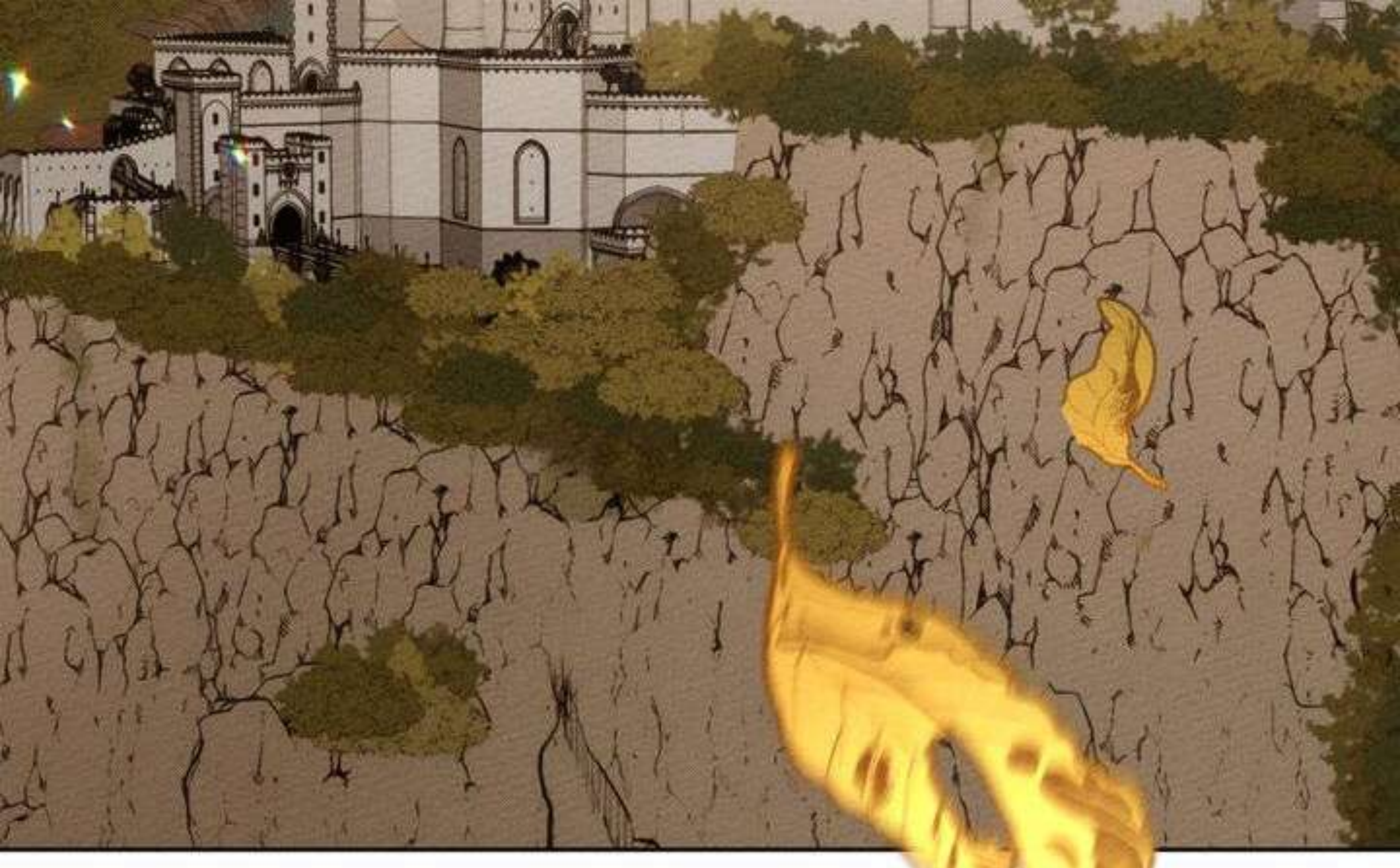
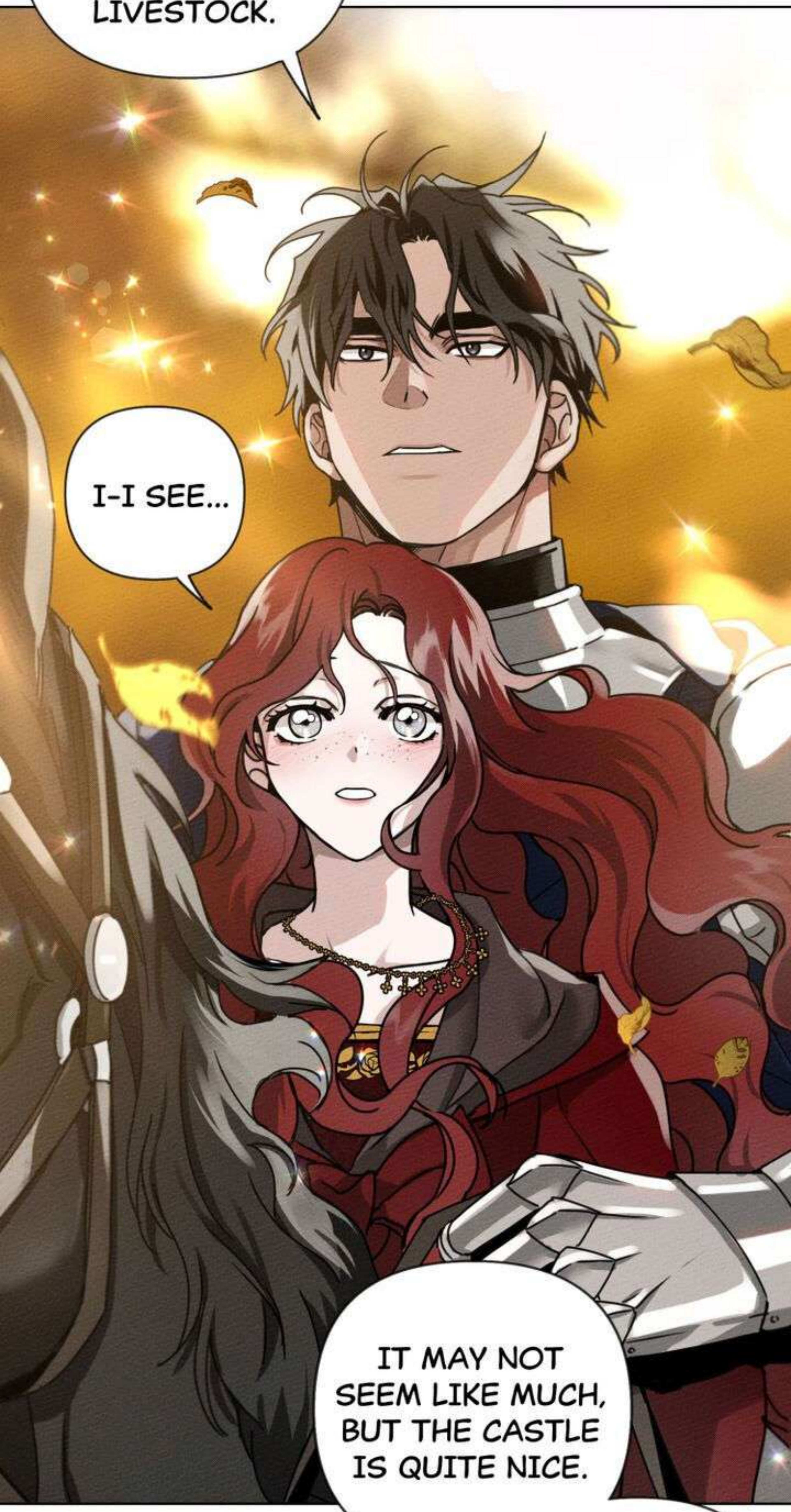
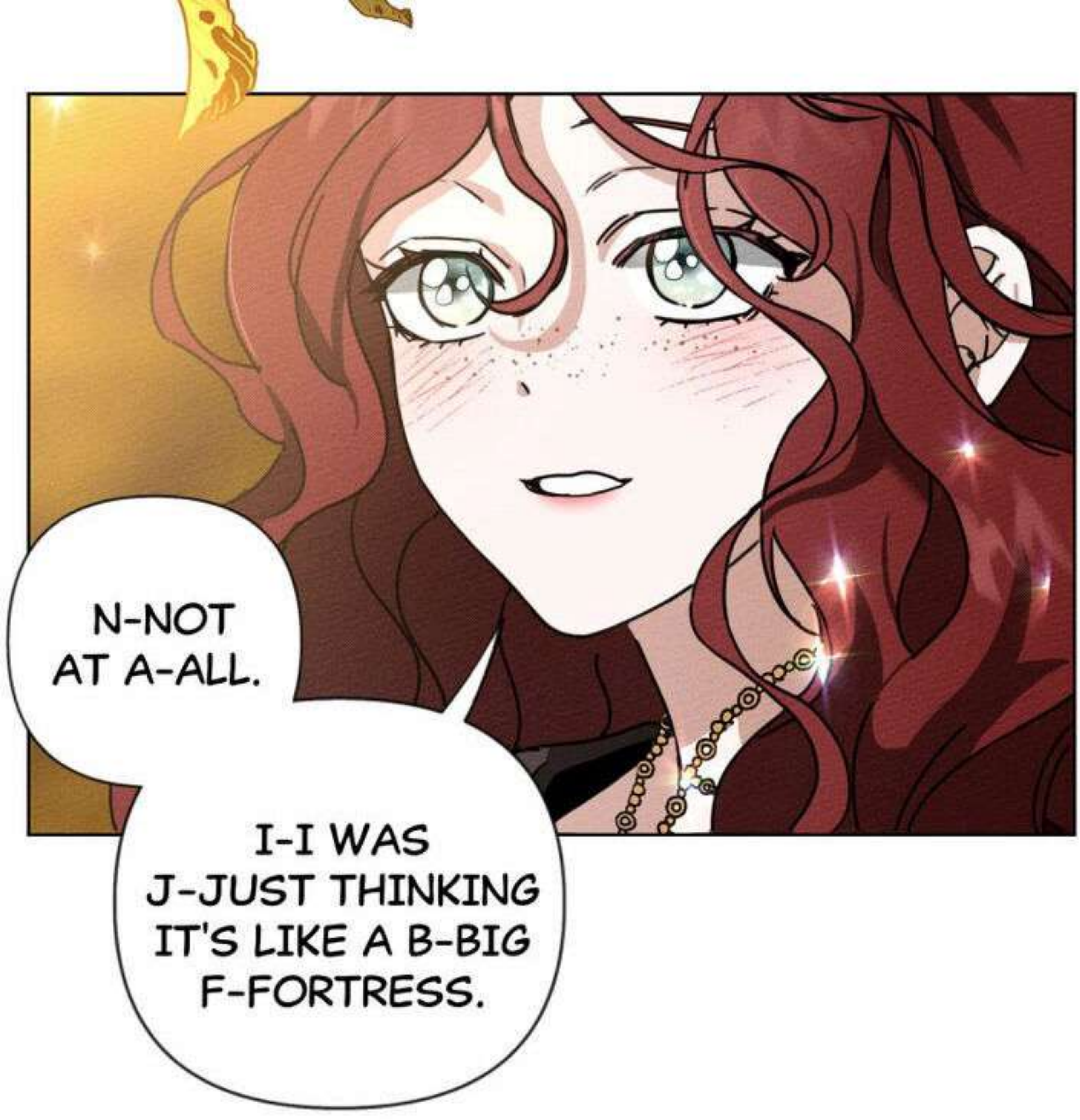
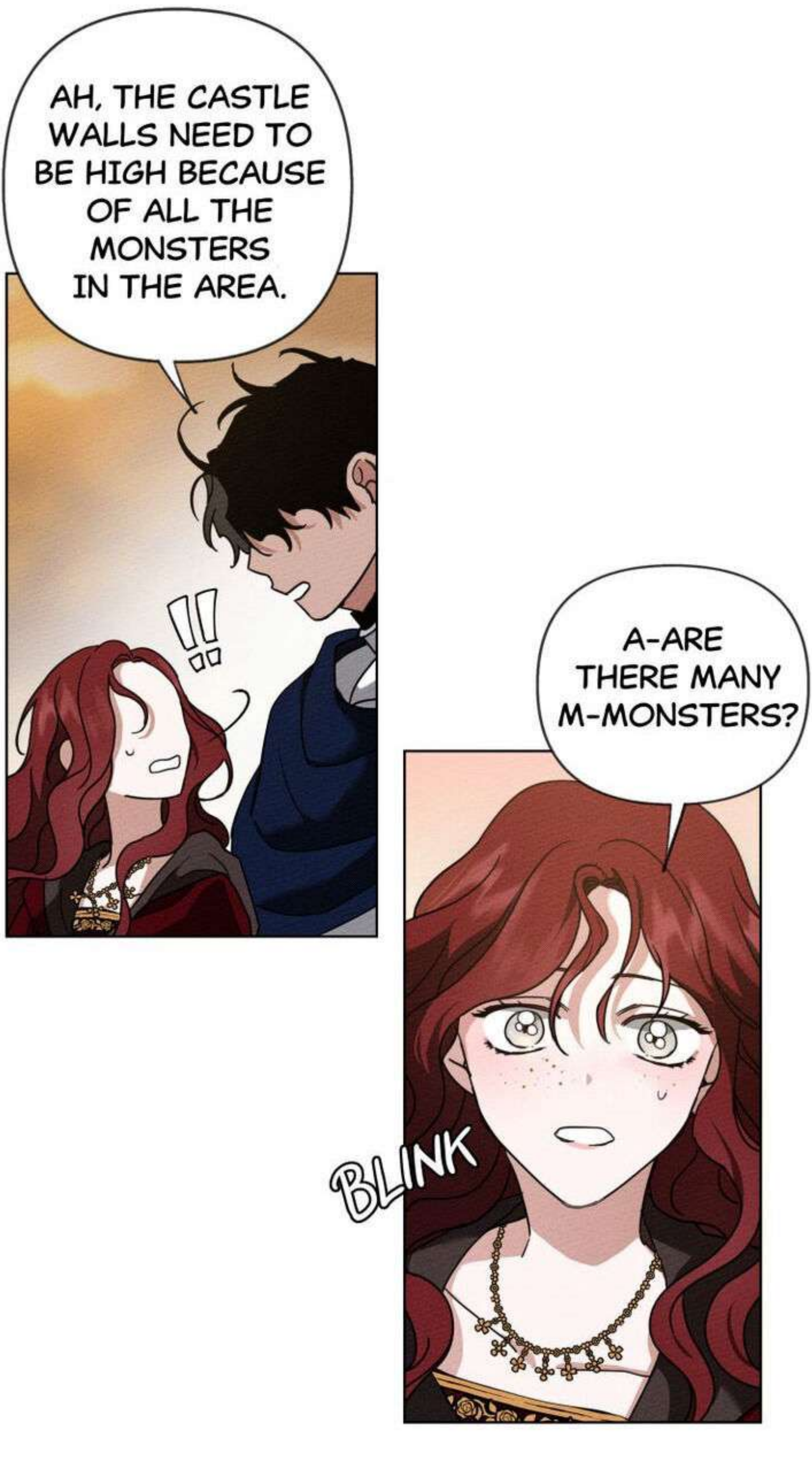
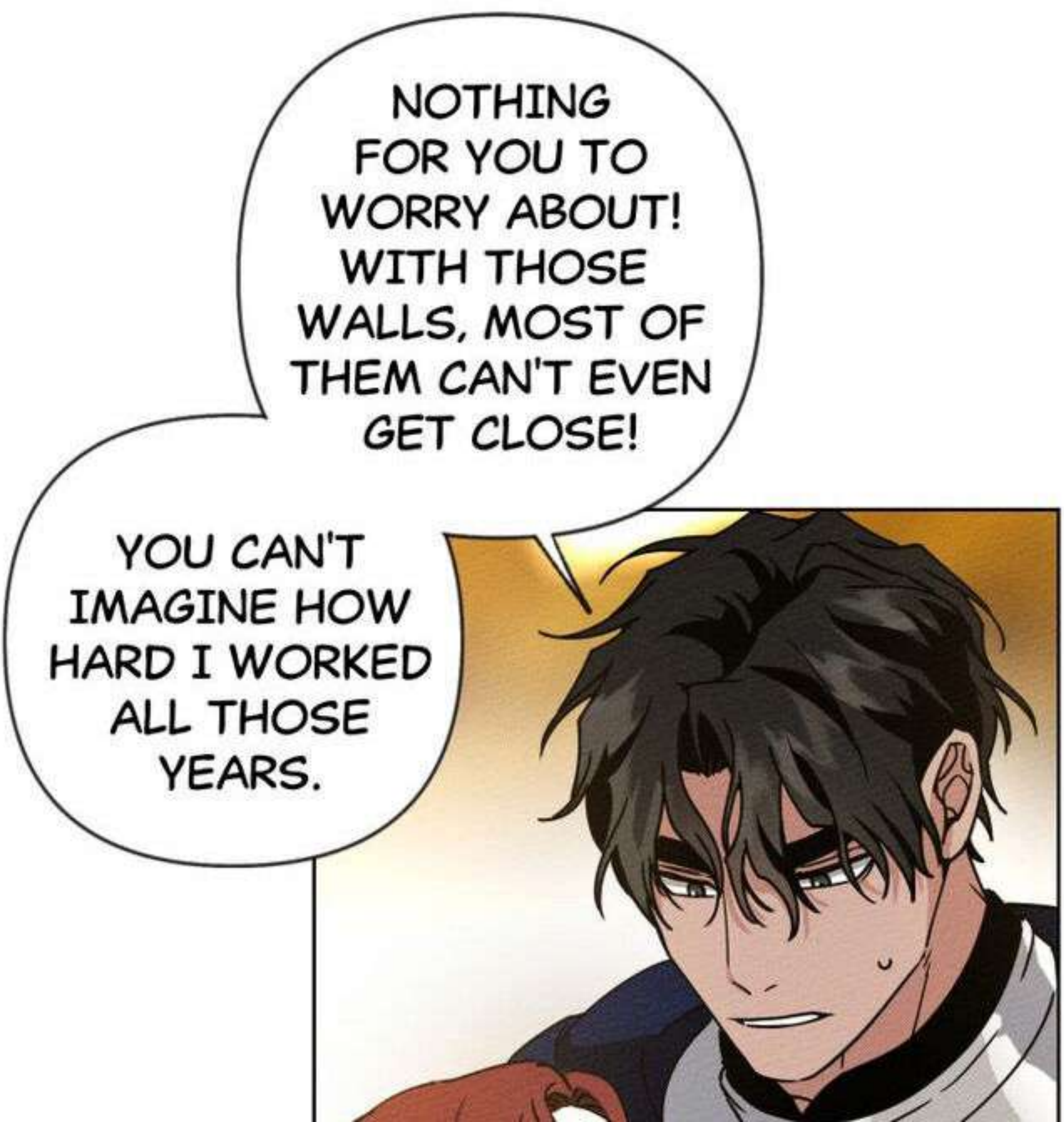
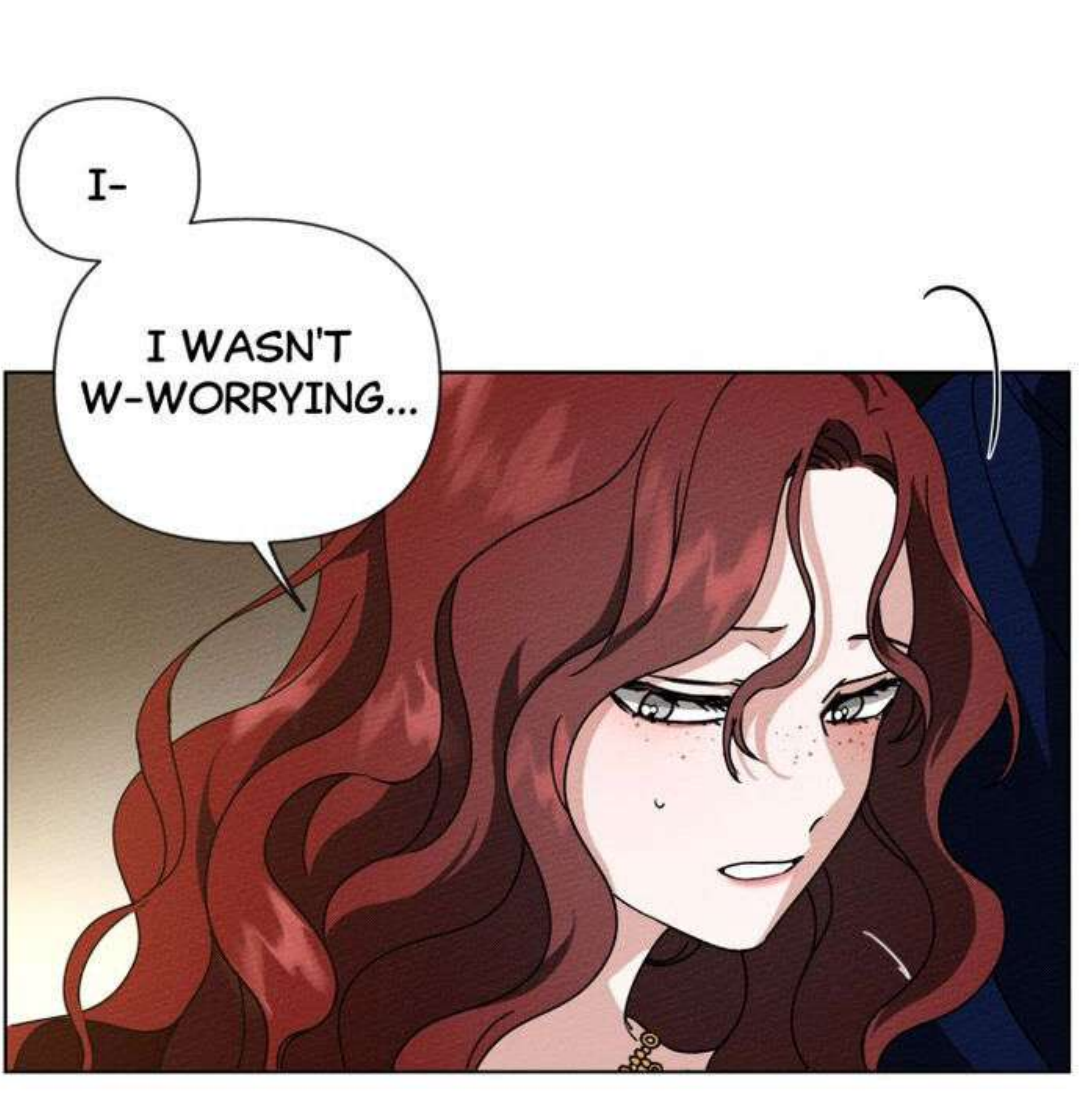


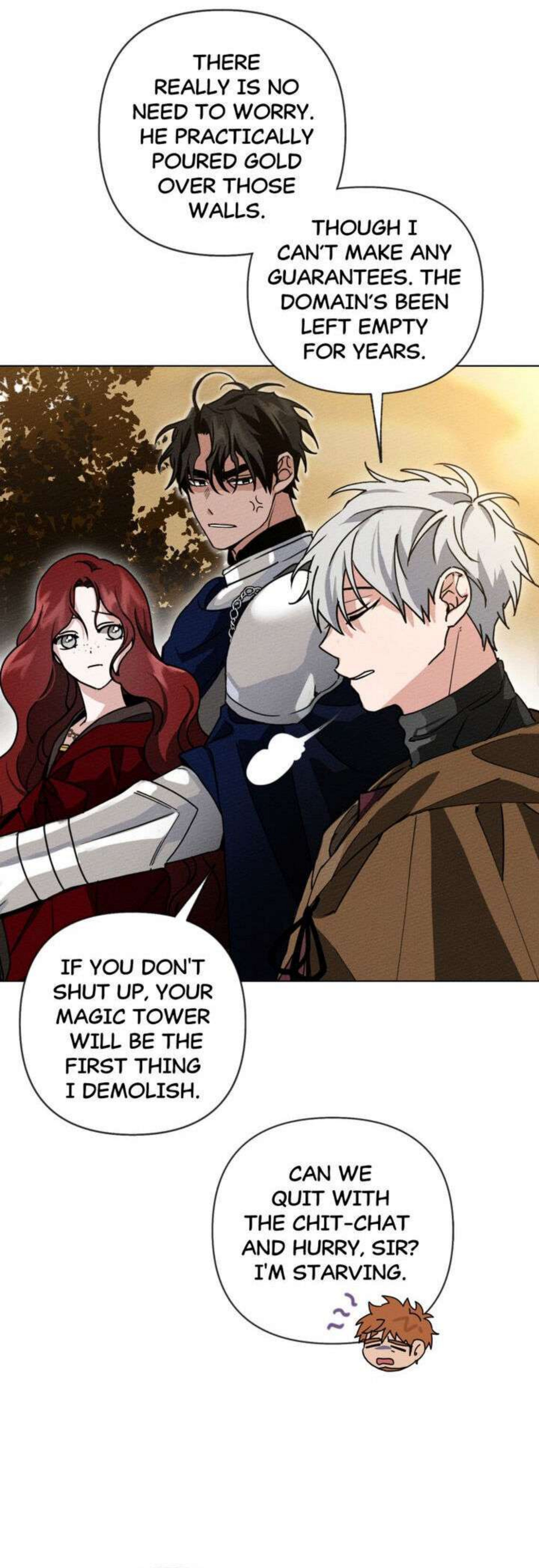

OUR PEOPLE ARE MOSTLY MERCENARIES OR MINERS.
THE LAND ISN'T ARABLE, AS YOU CAN SEE, SO OUR FARMERS MOSTLY RAISE LIVESTOCK.
I-I SEE...
IT MAY NOT SEEM LIKE MUCH, BUT THE CASTLE IS QUITE NICE.
ALTHOUGH NOT QUITE AS LUXURIOUS AS THE CROYSO CASTLE.

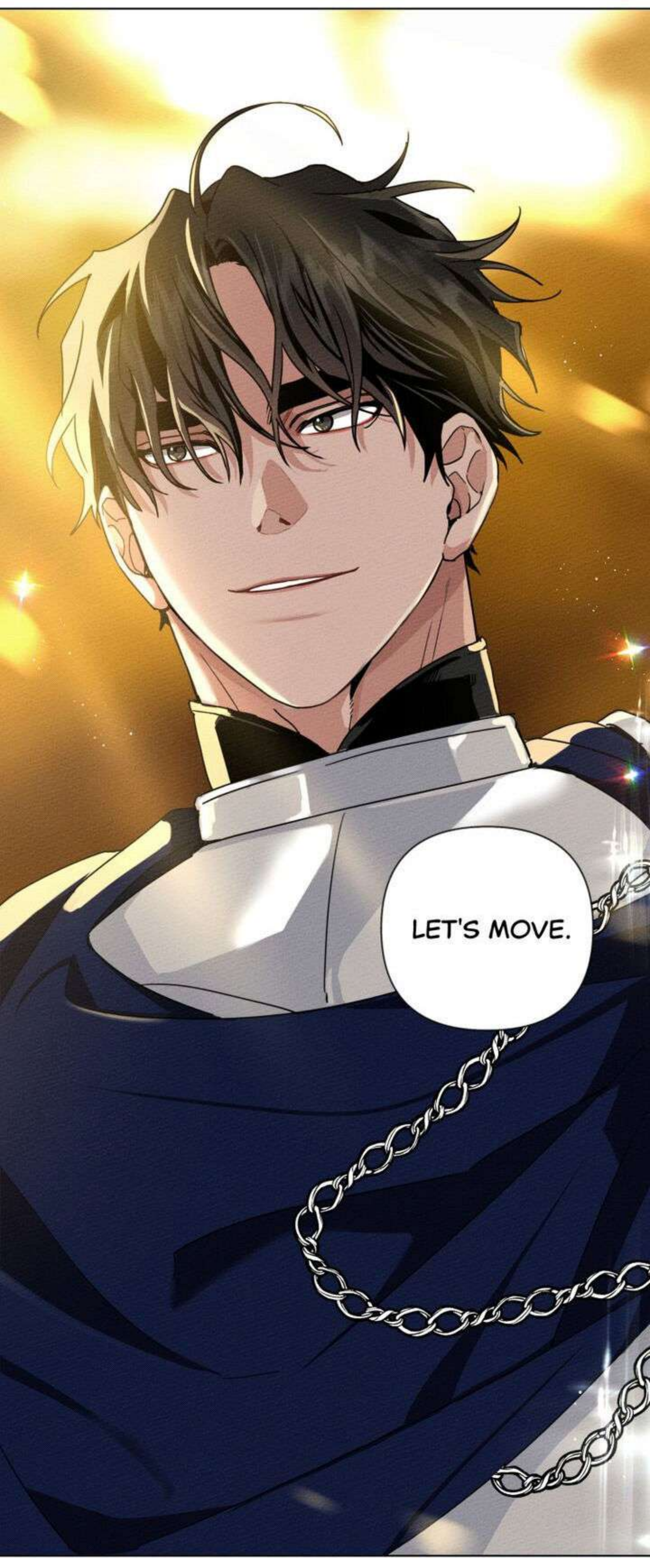

N-NOT AT A-ALL.
I-I WAS J-JUST THINKING IT'S LIKE A B-BIG F-FORTRESS.


AH, THE CASTLE WALLS NEED TO BE HIGH BECAUSE OF ALL THE MONSTERS IN THE AREA.
!!
A-ARE THERE MANY M-MONSTERS?
BLINK

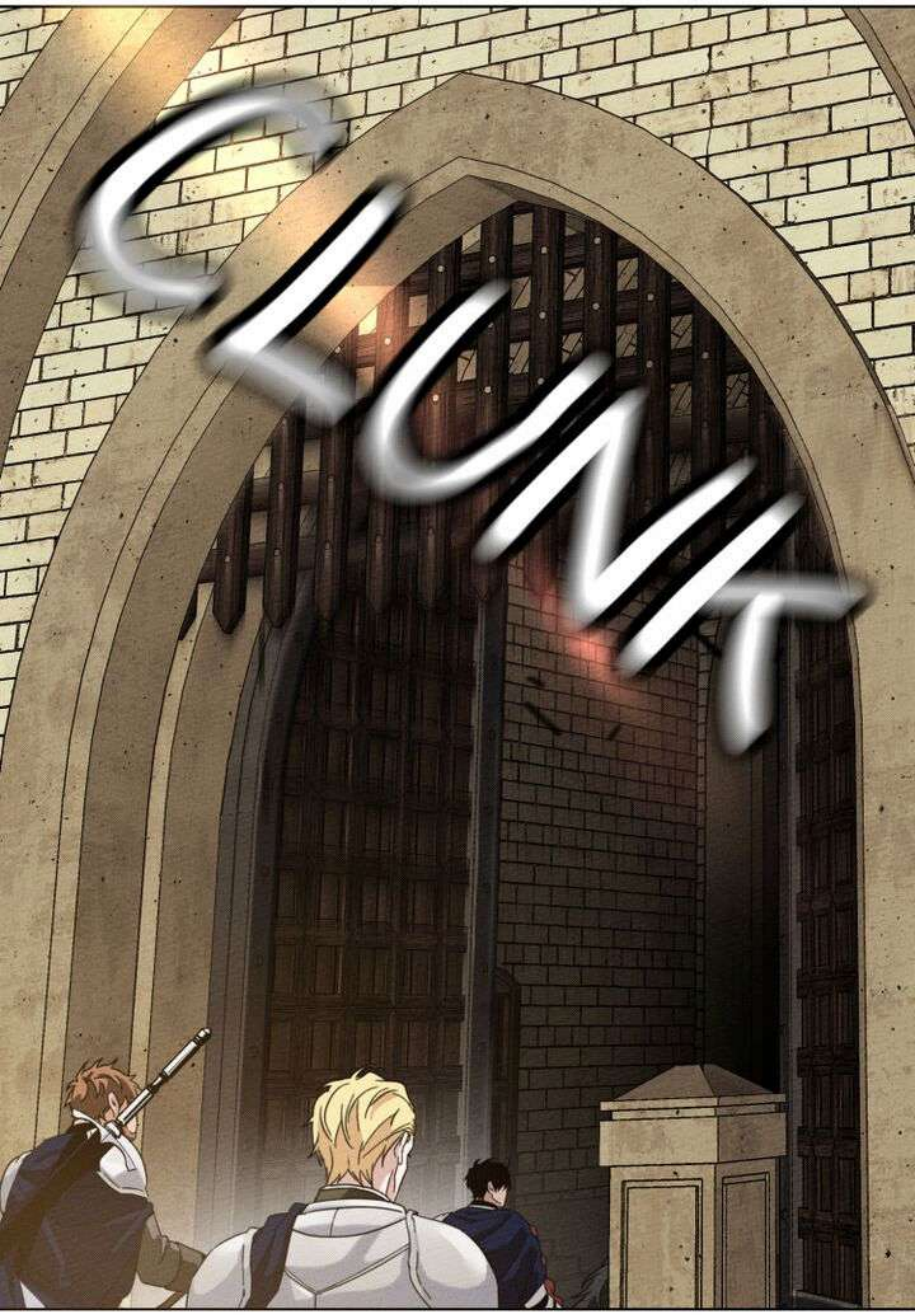

NOTHING FOR YOU TO WORRY ABOUT! WITH THOSE WALLS, MOST OF THEM CAN'T EVEN GET CLOSE!
YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW HARD I WORKED ALL THOSE YEARS.


I-
I WASN'T W-WORRYING...


THERE REALLY IS NO NEED TO WORRY. HE PRACTICALLY POURED GOLD OVER THOSE WALLS.
THOUGH I CAN'T MAKE ANY GUARANTEES. THE DOMAIN'S BEEN LEFT EMPTY FOR YEARS.
IF YOU DON'T SHUT UP, YOUR MAGIC TOWER WILL BE THE FIRST THING I DEMOLISH.
CAN WE QUIT WITH THE CHIT-CHAT AND HURRY, SIR? I'M STARVING.
ALL RIGHT.


LET'S MOVE.

THUNK!
OUR LORD AND HIS REMDRAGON KNIGHTS HAVE RETURNED!
THUNK!
OPEN THE GATES!
THUNK!

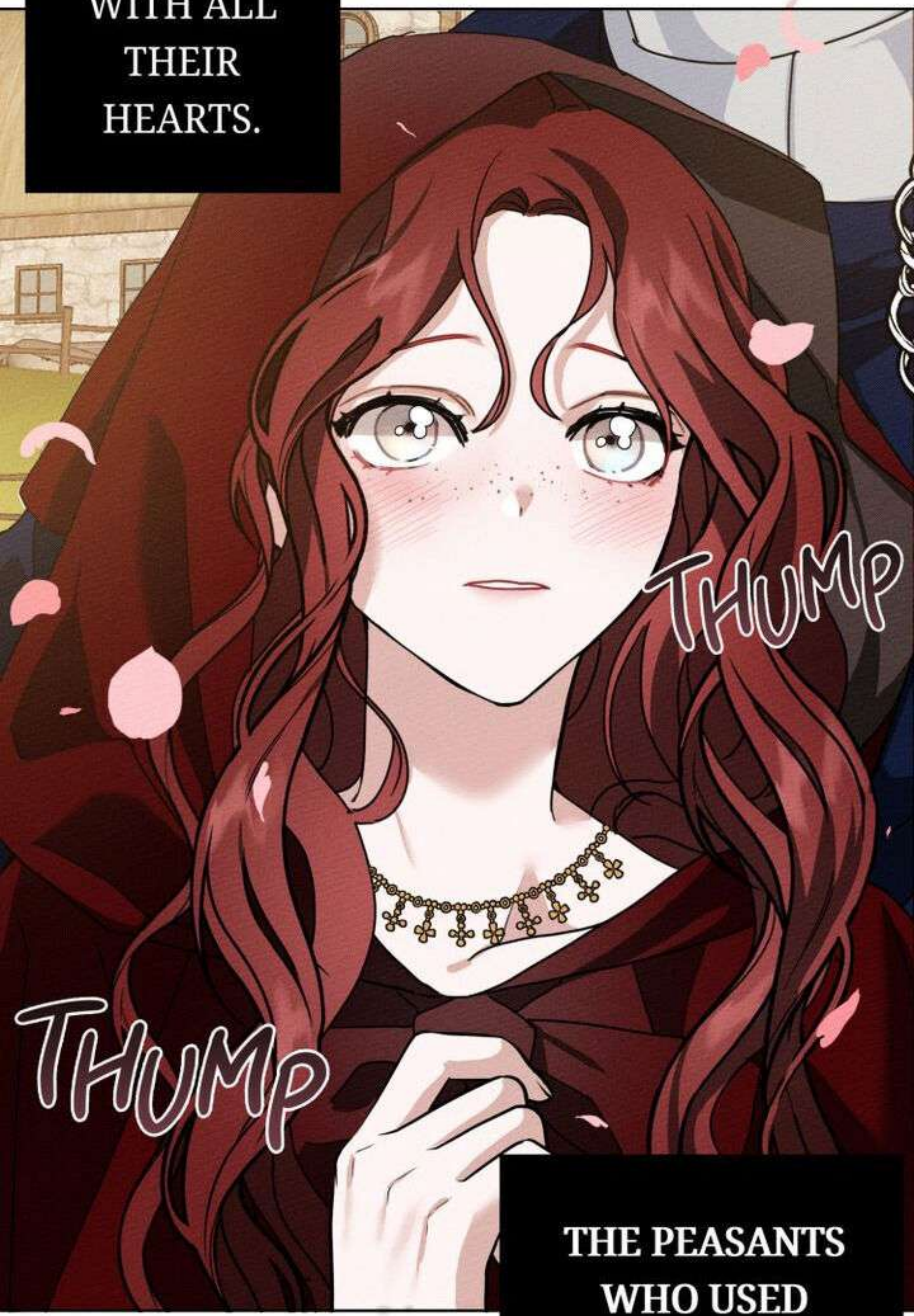

CLUNK

HURRAH
ROSEM WIGREW!
ROSEM WIGREW!
ROSEM WIGREW D'CALYPSE! THE INCARNATION OF WIGREW!
HURRAH

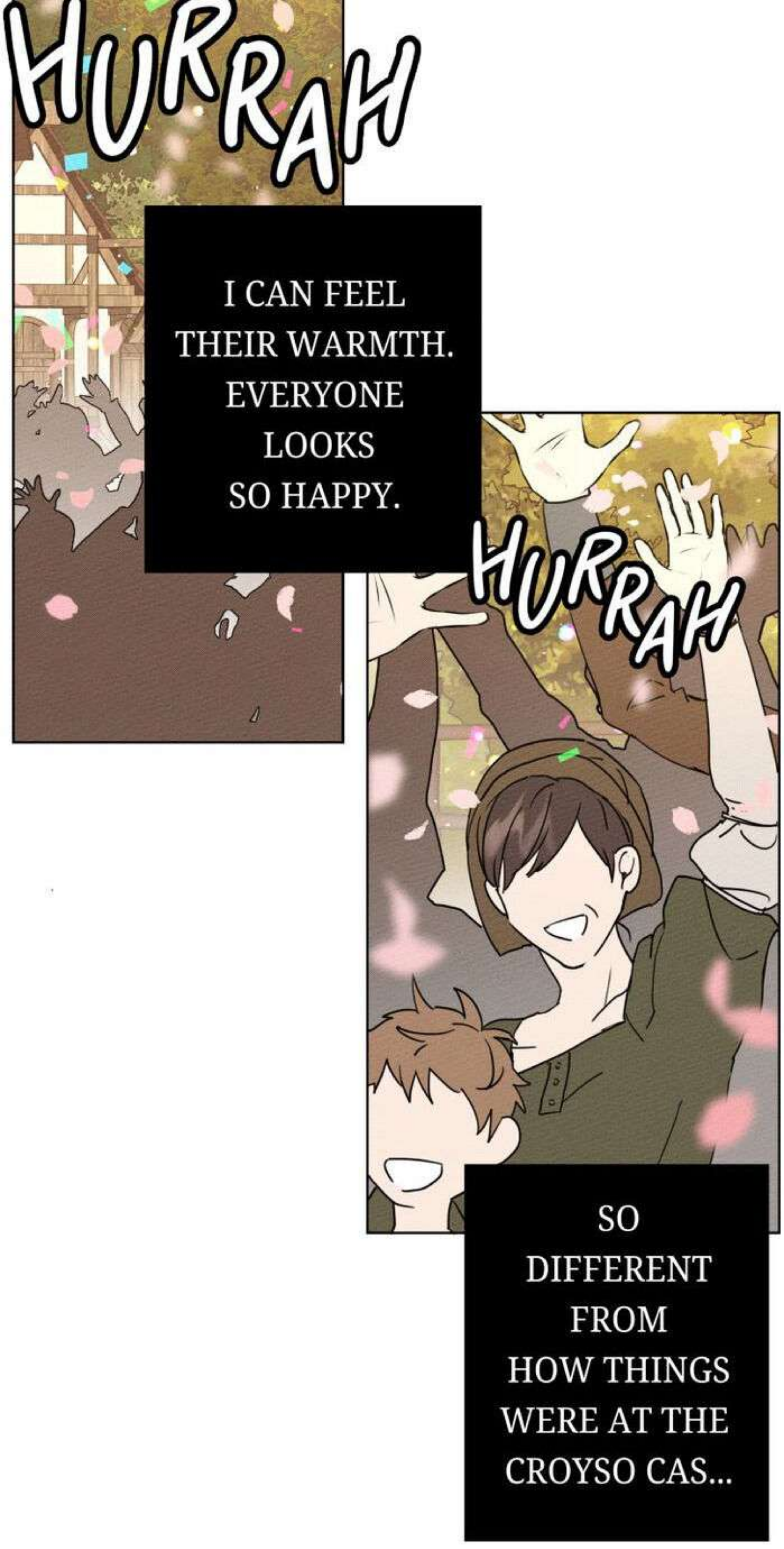
RIFTAN CALYPSE, THE GREAT DRAGON SLAYER!
HURRAH
OH, SAVIOR OF THE CONTINENT, LET US EXALT YOUR NAME. OH, PROTECTOR OF ANATOL, MAY YOUR LEGACY LIVE ON FOREVER!
ALL HAIL THE LIEGE LORD! LONG LIVE ANATOL!
HURRAH
ROSEM WIGREW! ROSEM WIGREW!

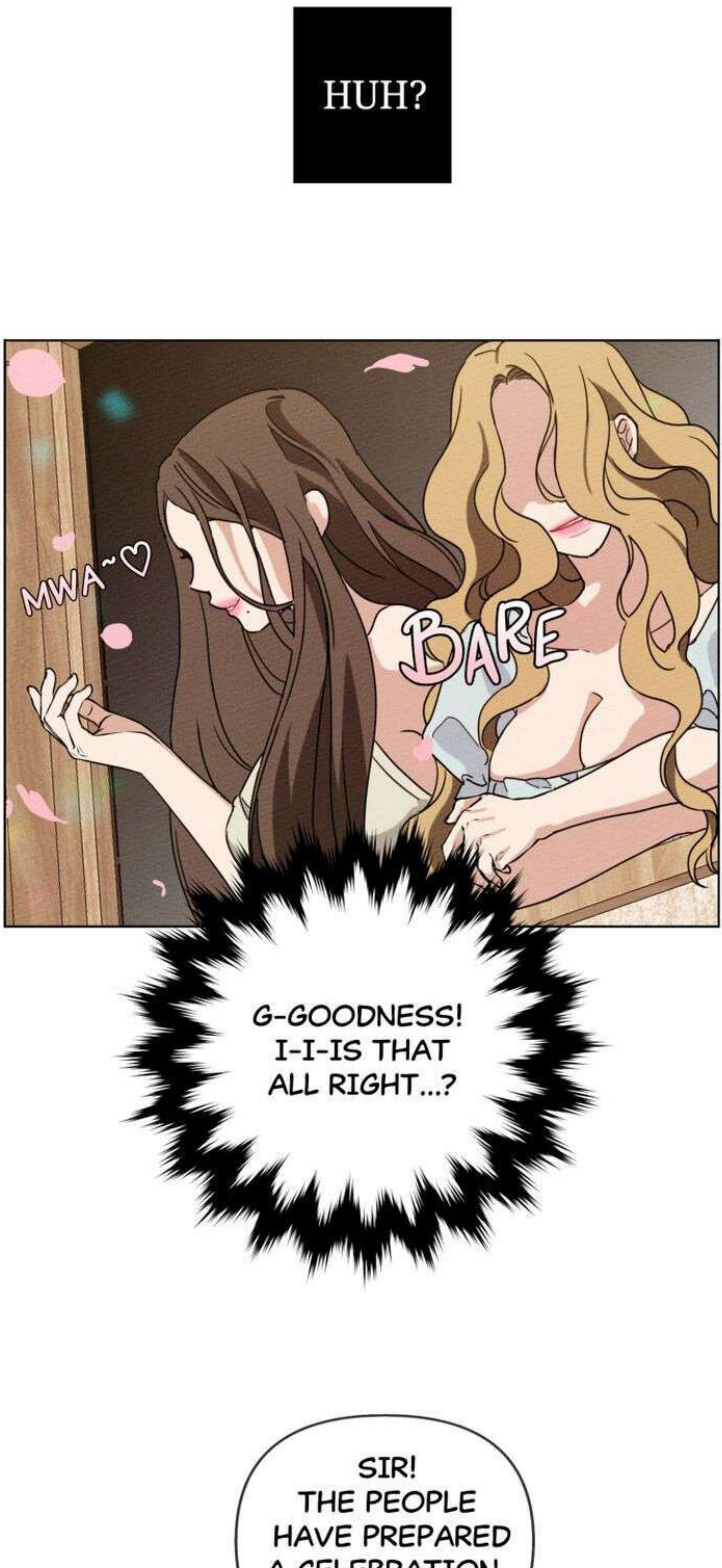
ALL HAIL THE REMDRAGON KNIGHTS!

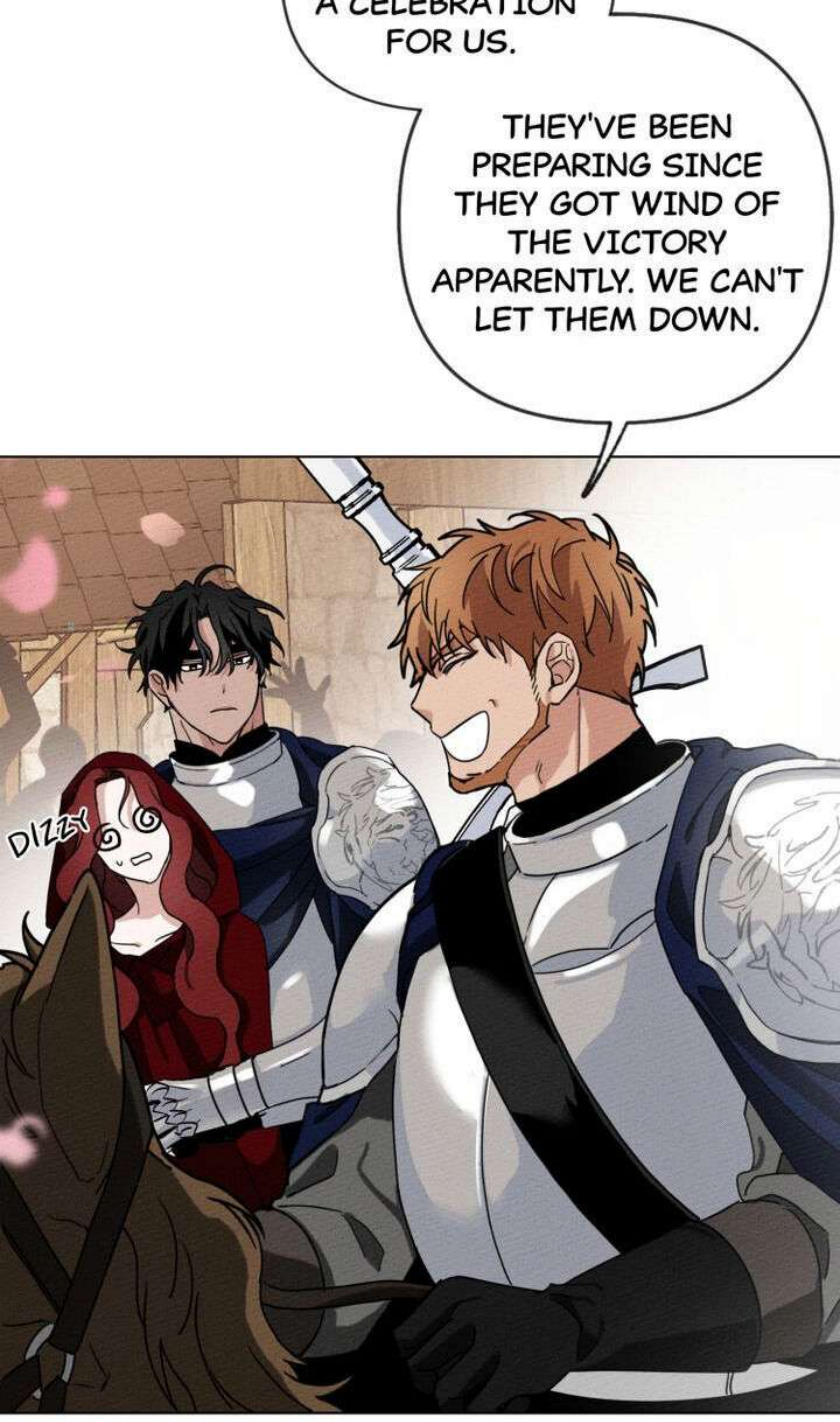
THEY'RE CHEERING WITH ALL THEIR HEARTS.

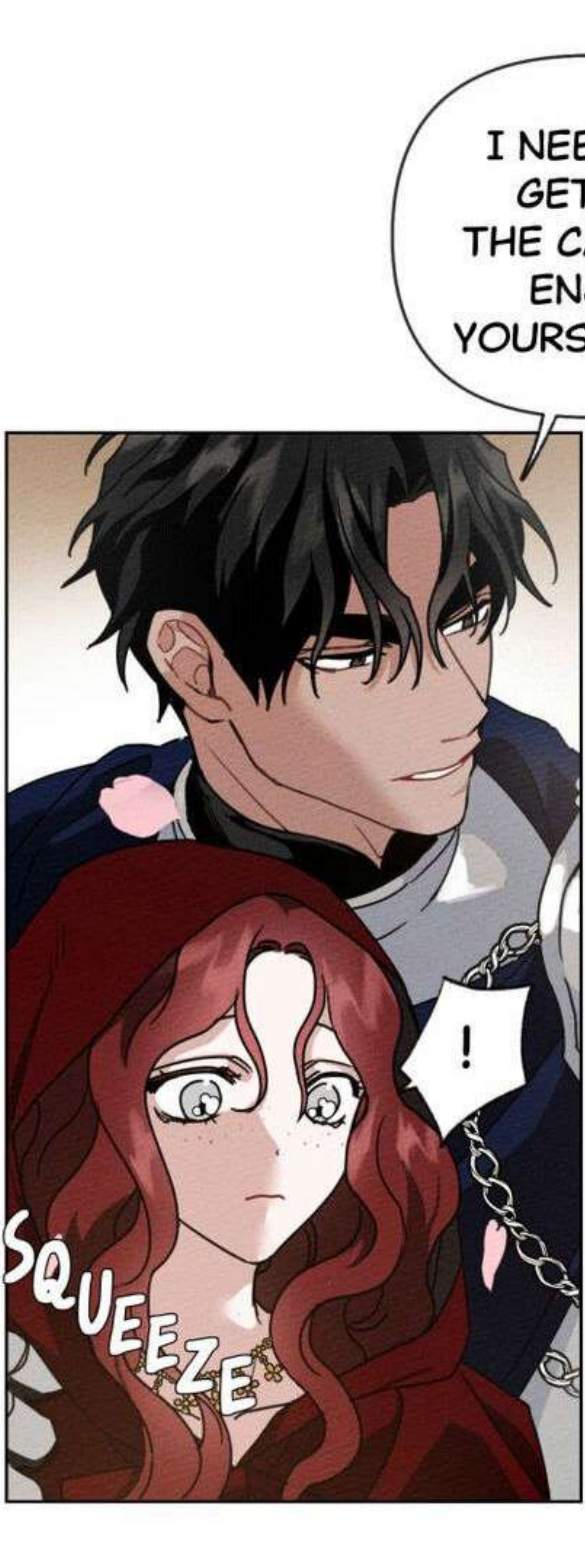

THUMP
THUMP

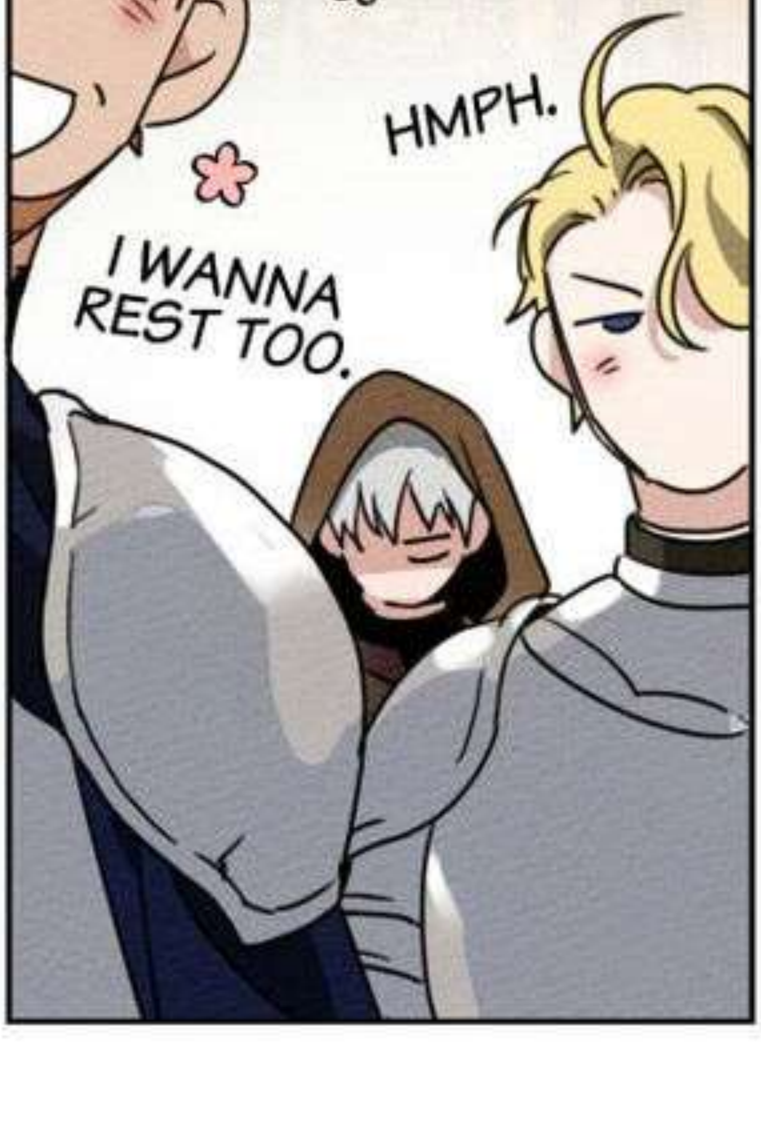
THE PEASANTS WHO USED TO VISIT OUR CASTLE WOULD BOW THEIR HEADS IN FEAR OF MY FATHER...

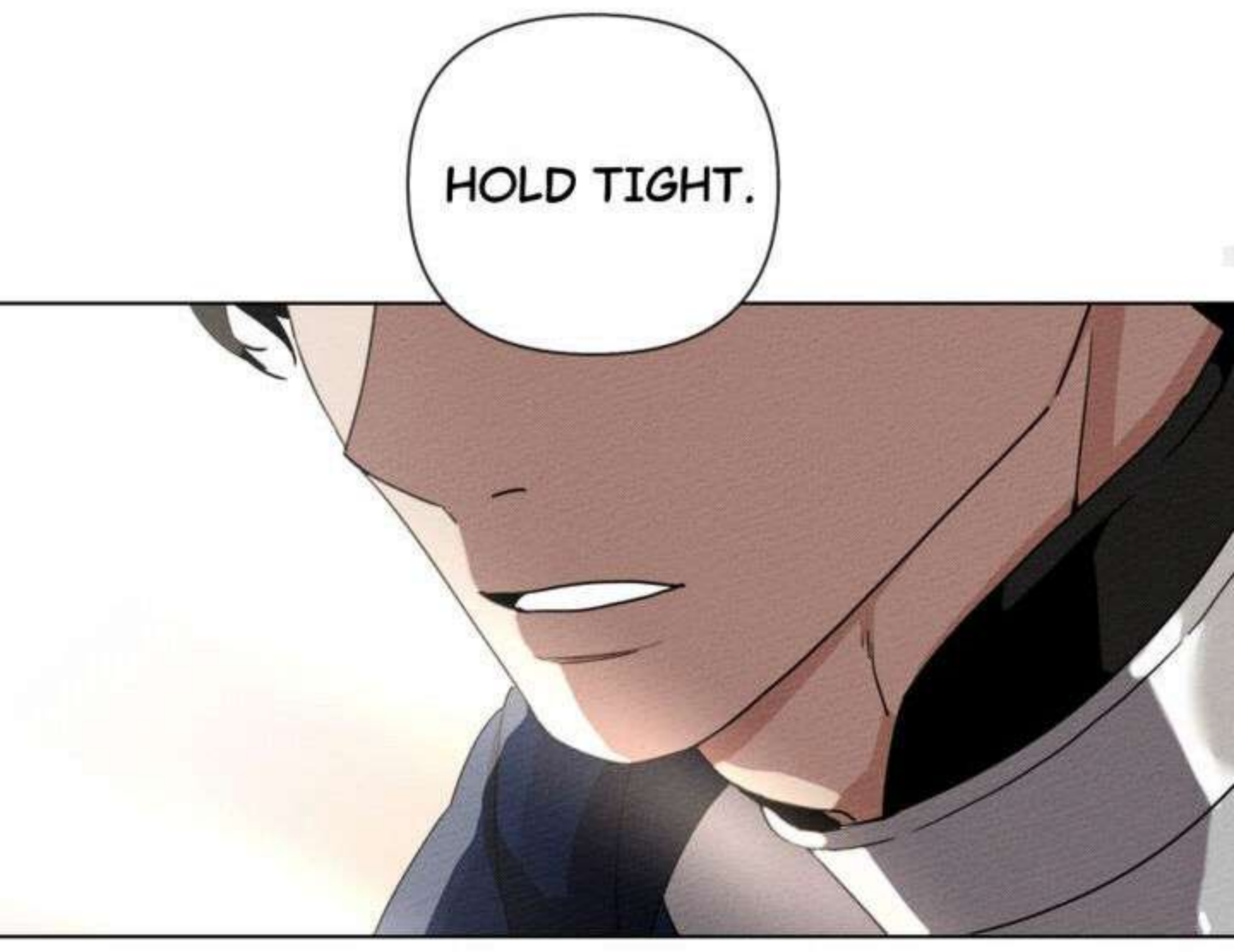

HURRAH
I CAN FEEL THEIR WARMTH. EVERYONE LOOKS SO HAPPY.
HURRAH
SO DIFFERENT FROM HOW THINGS WERE AT THE CROYSO CAS...

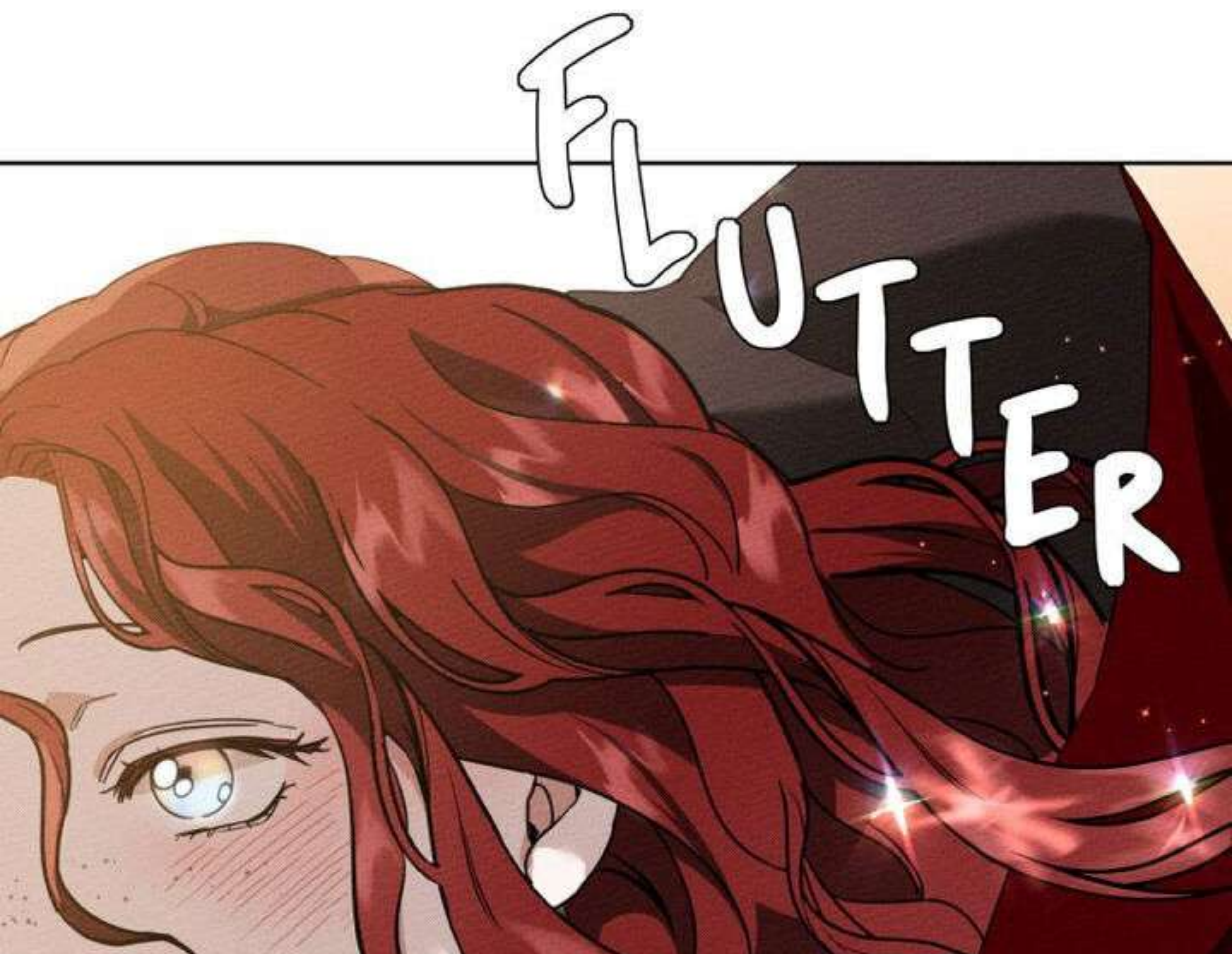

HUH?
MWA~♡
BARE
G-GOODNESS! I-I-IS THAT ALL RIGHT...?
SIR! THE PEOPLE HAVE PREPARED A CELEBRATION


A CELEBRATION FOR US.
THEY'VE BEEN PREPARING SINCE THEY GOT WIND OF THE VICTORY APPARENTLY. WE CAN'T LET THEM DOWN.
DIZZY

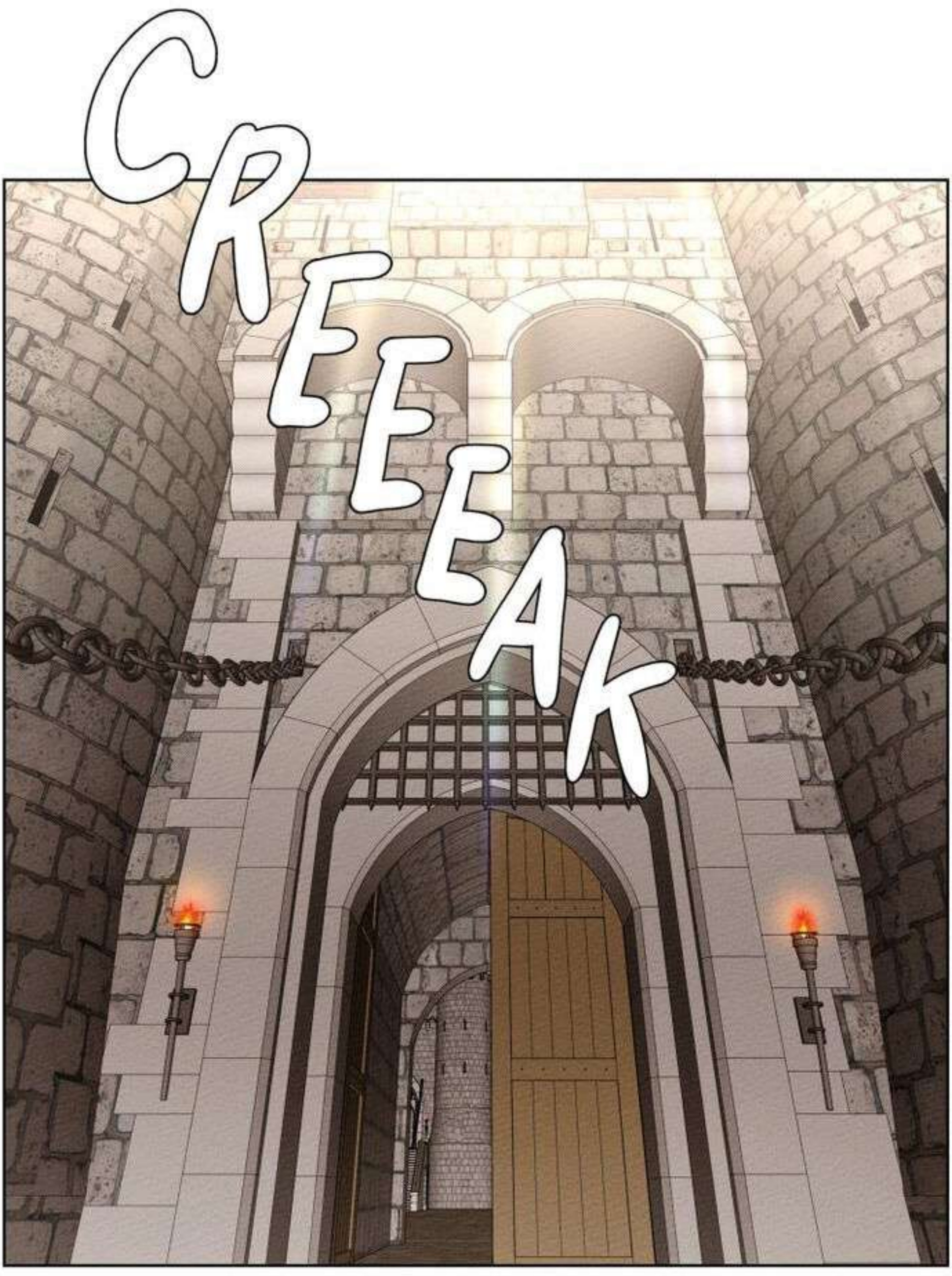

I NEED TO GET TO THE CASTLE. ENJOY YOURSELVES.
!
SQUEEZE

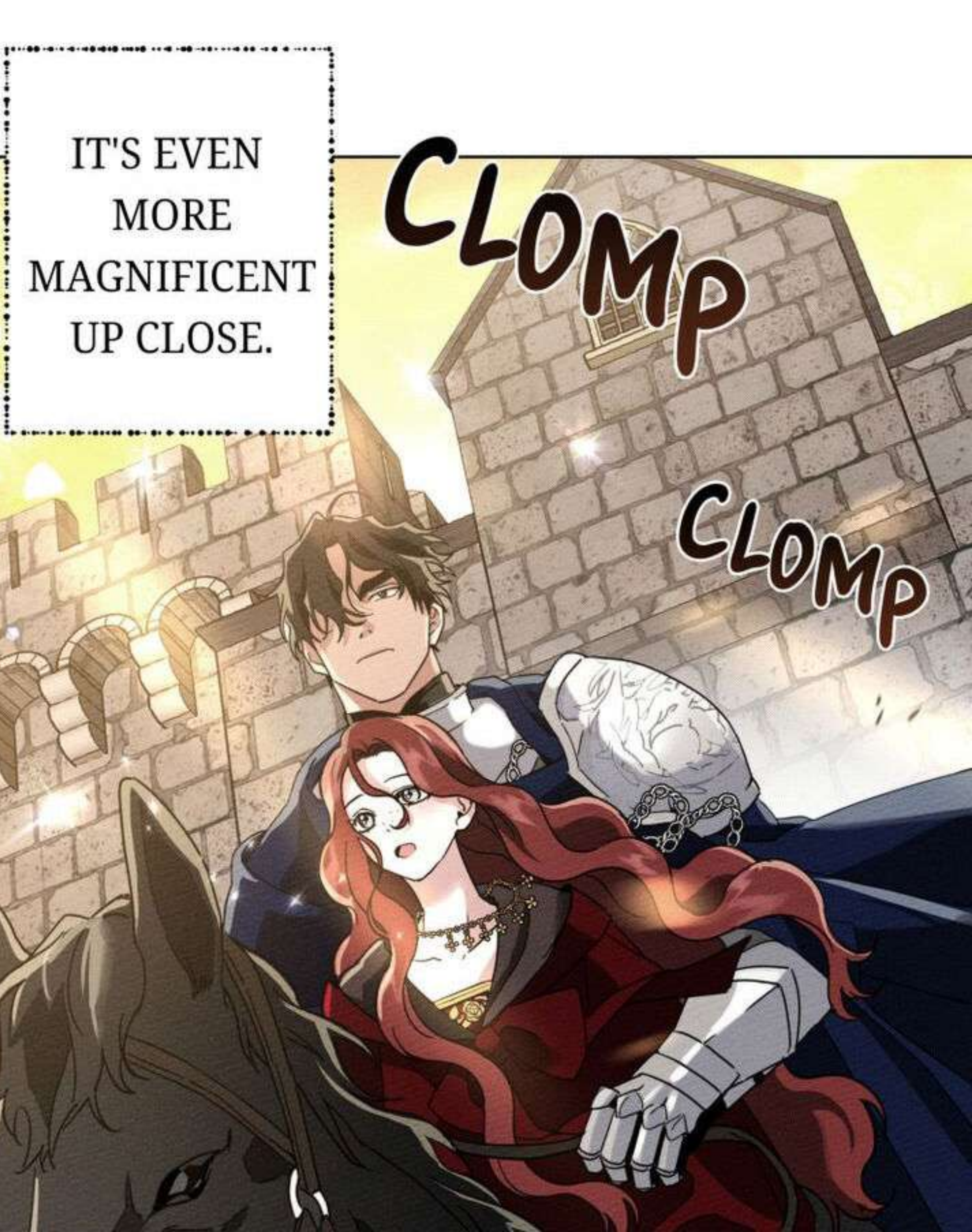

YES, SIR!
HMPH.
I WANNA REST TOO.

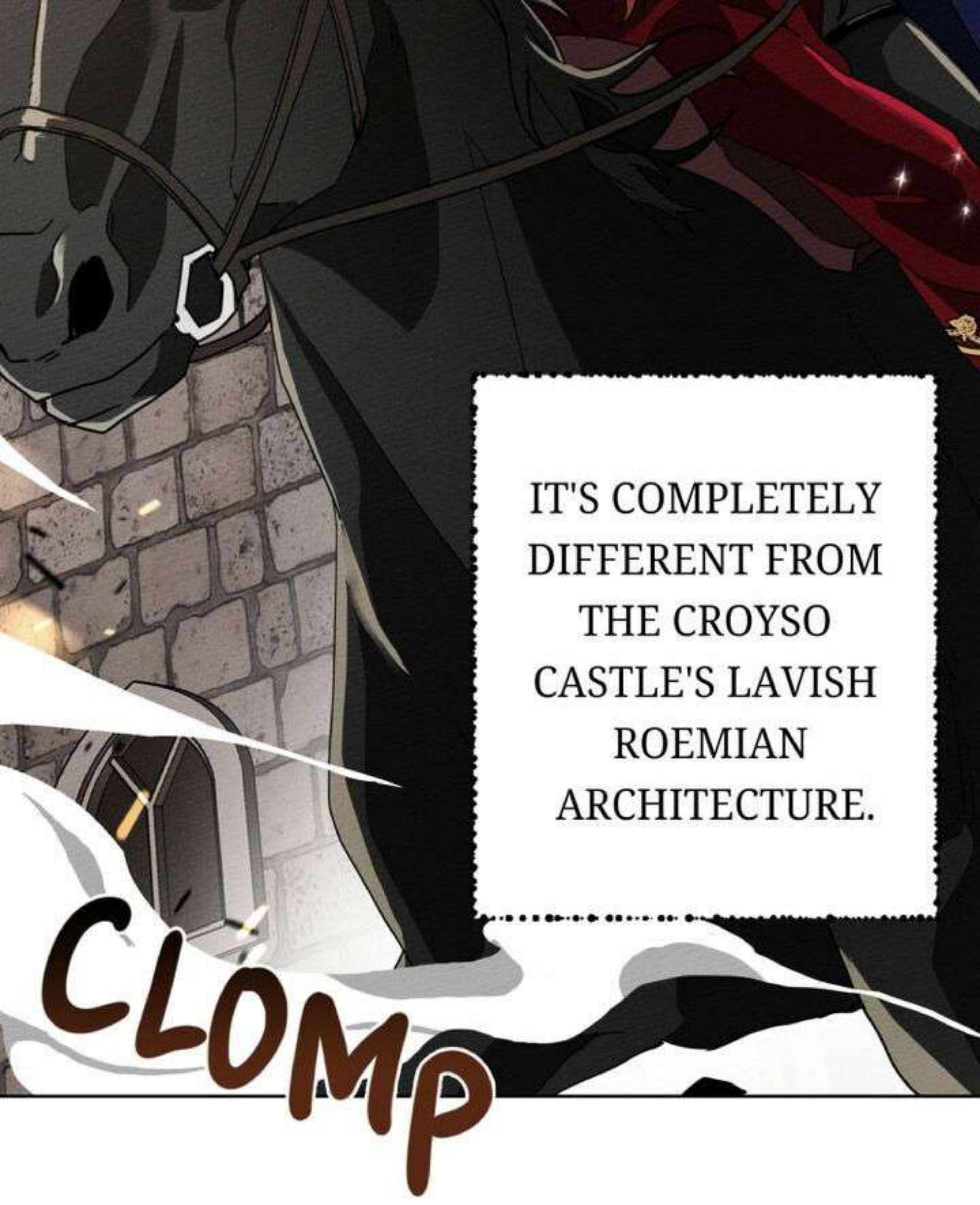

HOLD TIGHT.

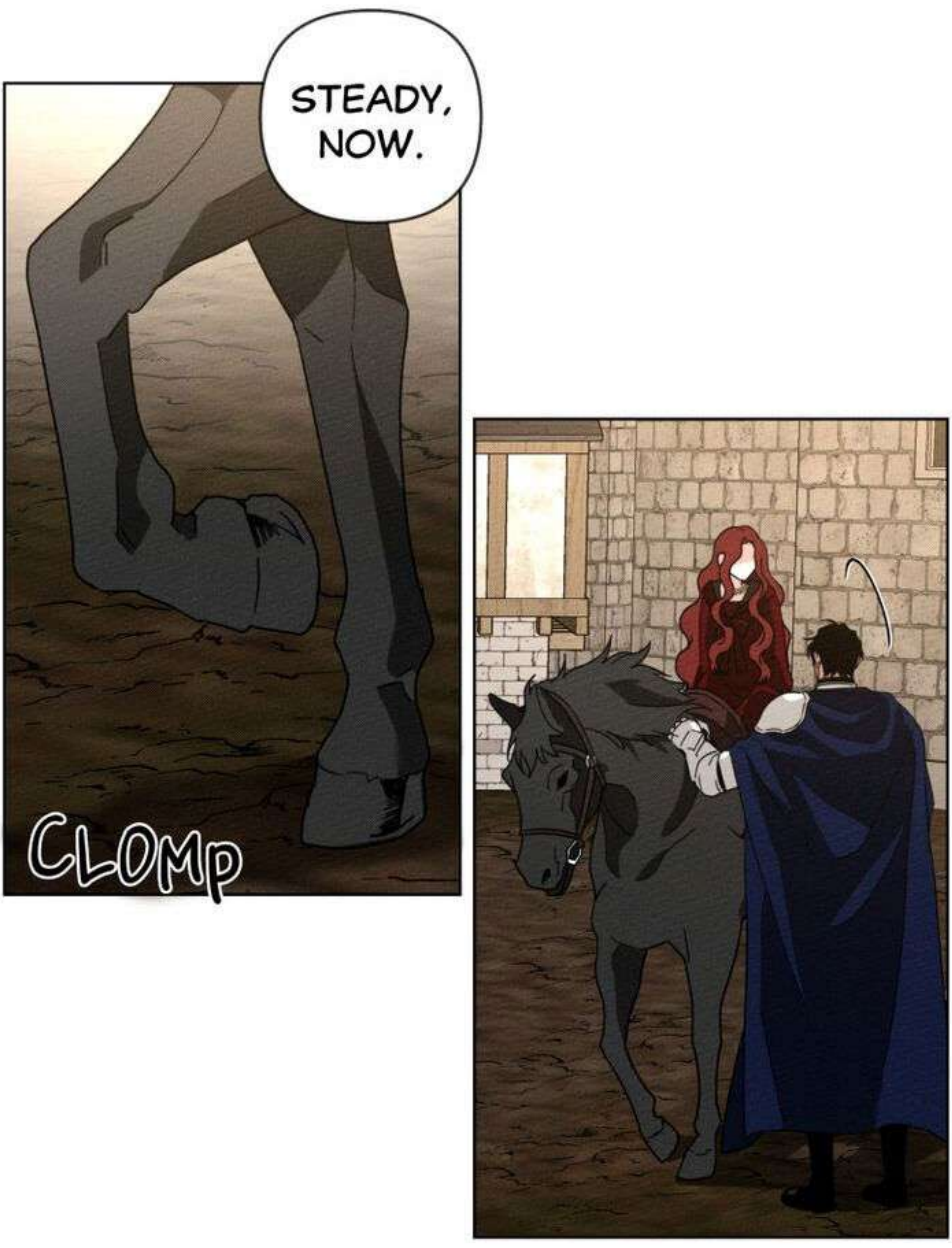

FLUTTER

CLOMP

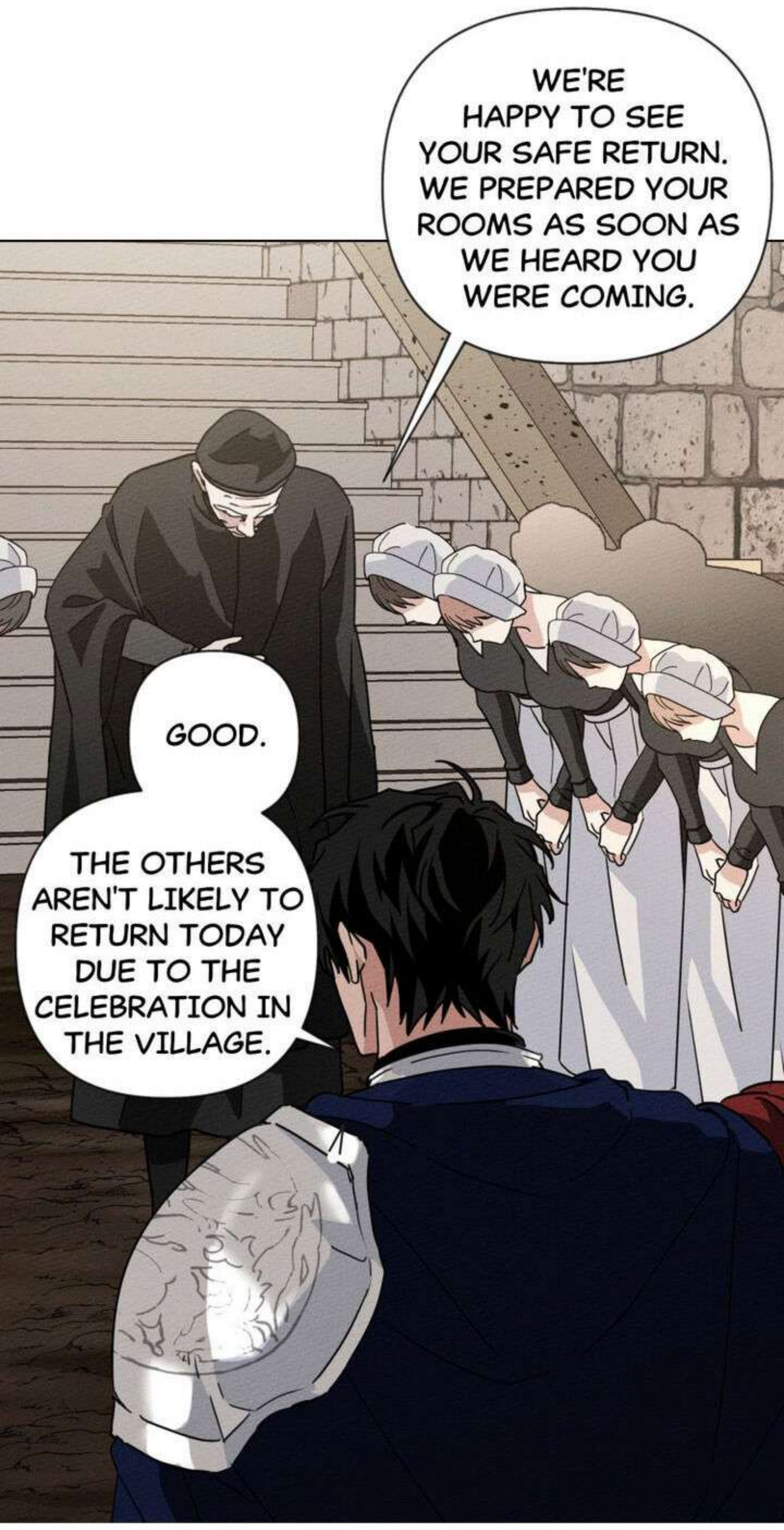

CREEEAK

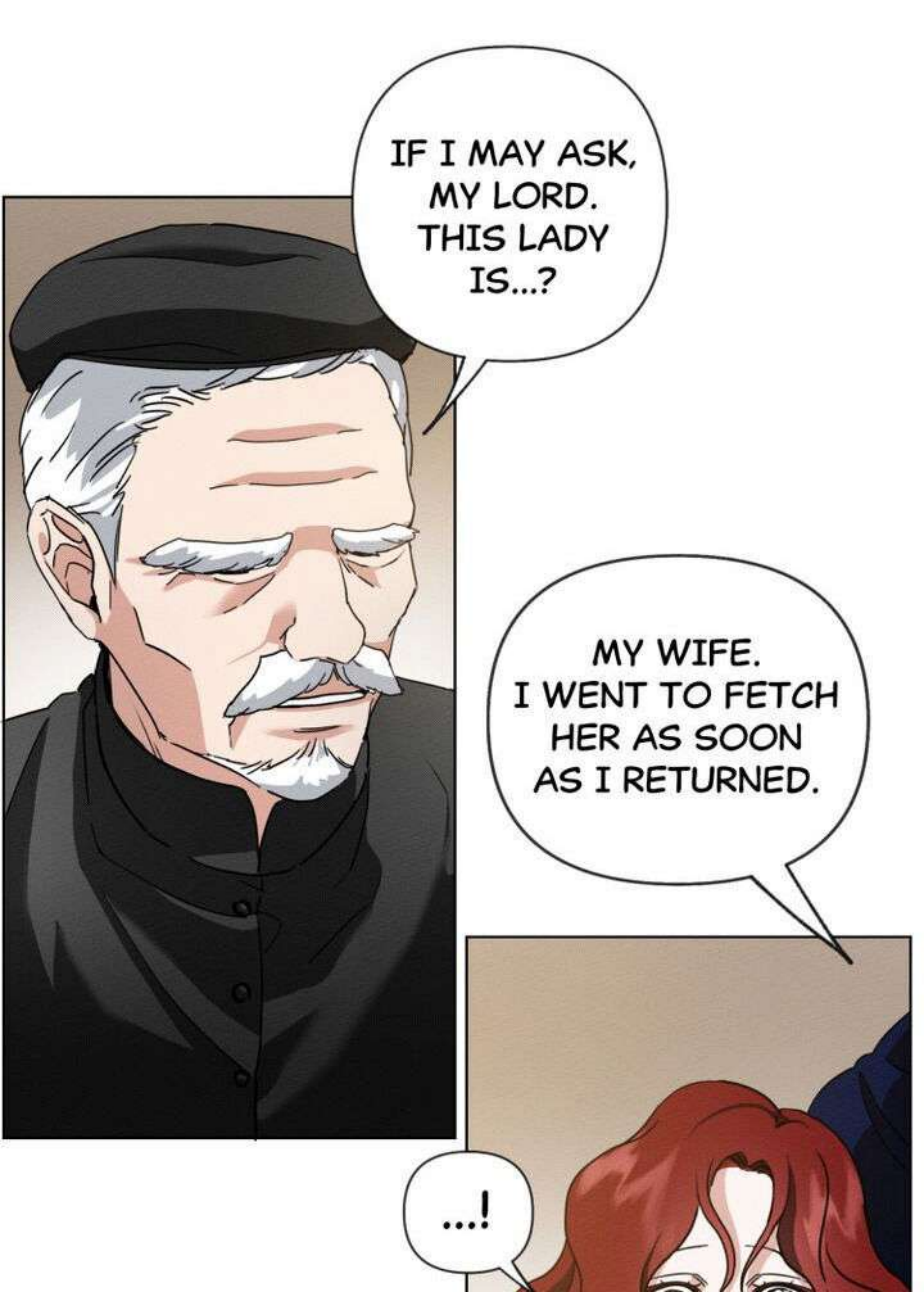

IT'S EVEN MORE MAGNIFICENT UP CLOSE.
CLOMP
CLOMP

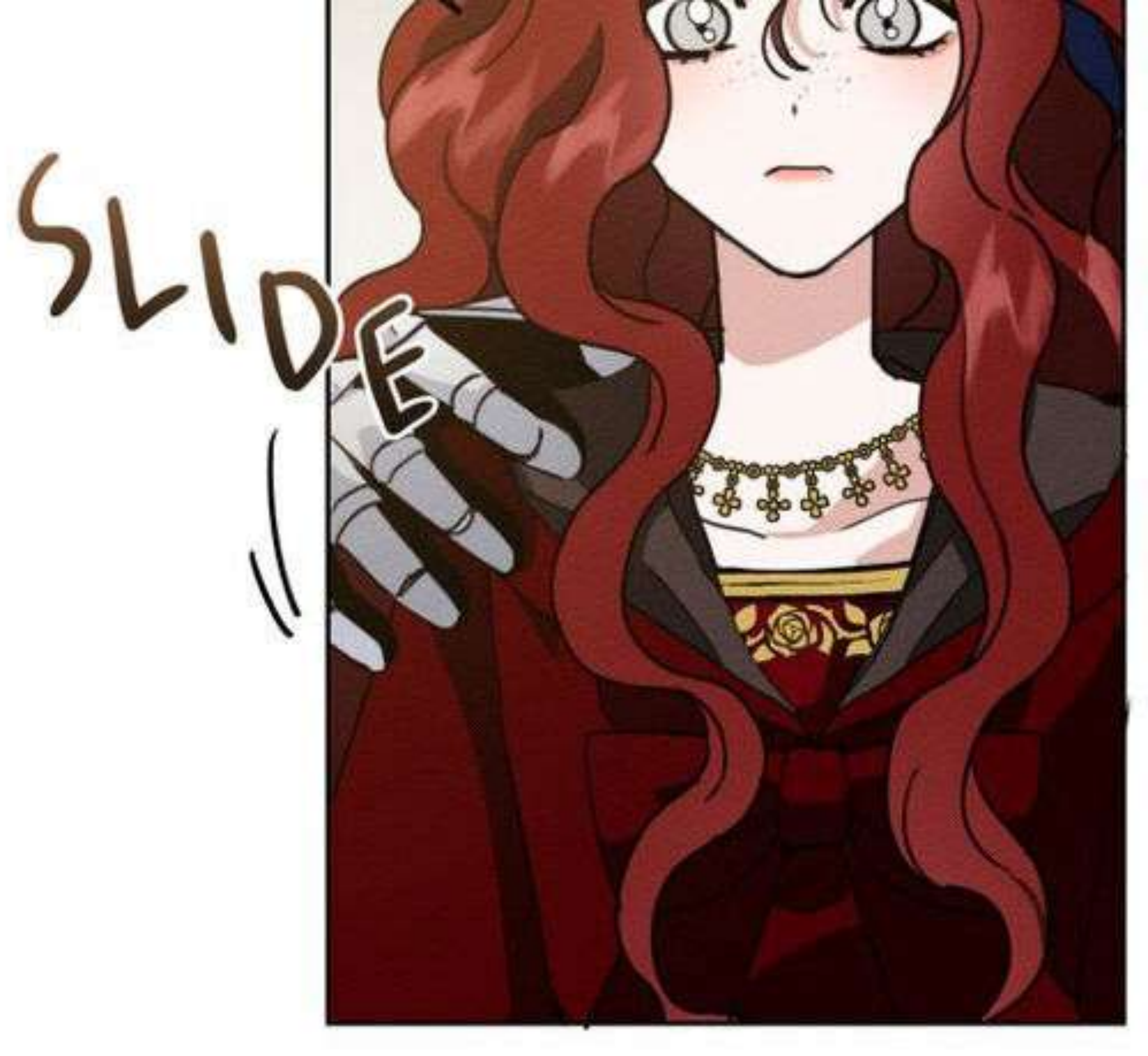

IT'S COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM THE CROYSO CASTLE'S LAVISH ROEMIAN ARCHITECTURE.
CLOMP

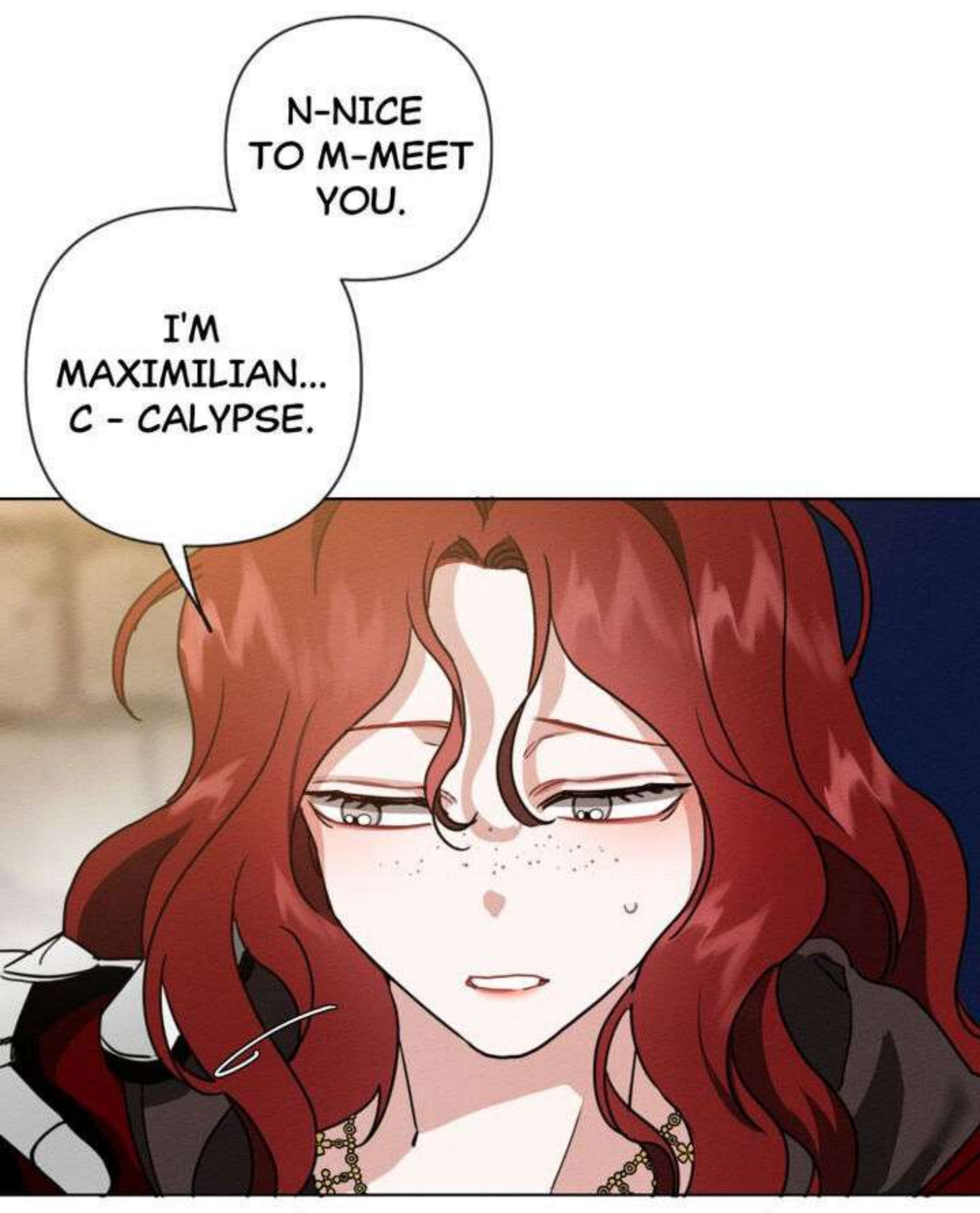

STEADY, NOW.
CLOMP

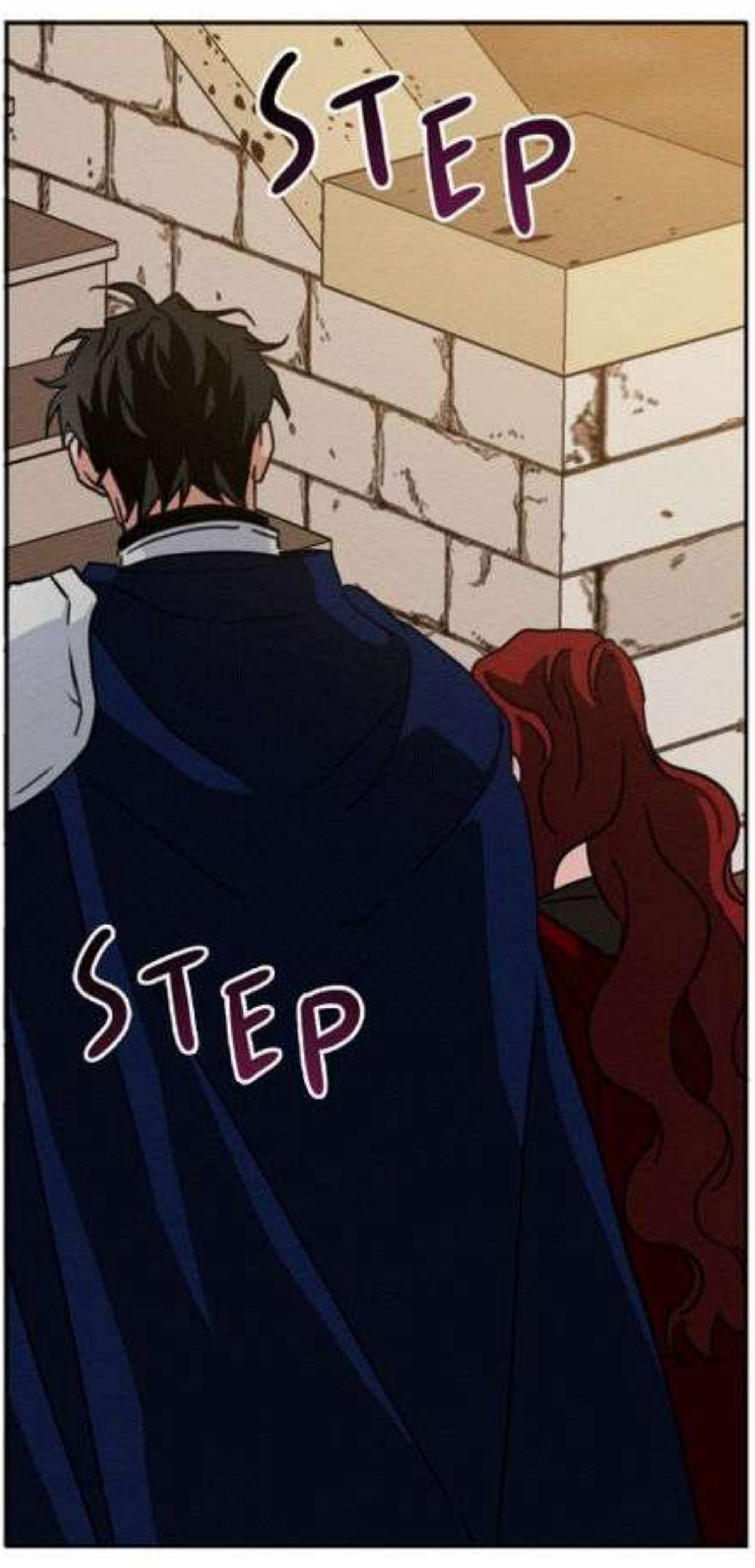
WELCOME BACK, MY LORD.


WE'RE HAPPY TO SEE YOUR SAFE RETURN. WE PREPARED YOUR ROOMS AS SOON AS WE HEARD YOU WERE COMING.
GOOD.
THE OTHERS AREN'T LIKELY TO RETURN TODAY DUE TO THE CELEBRATION IN THE VILLAGE.

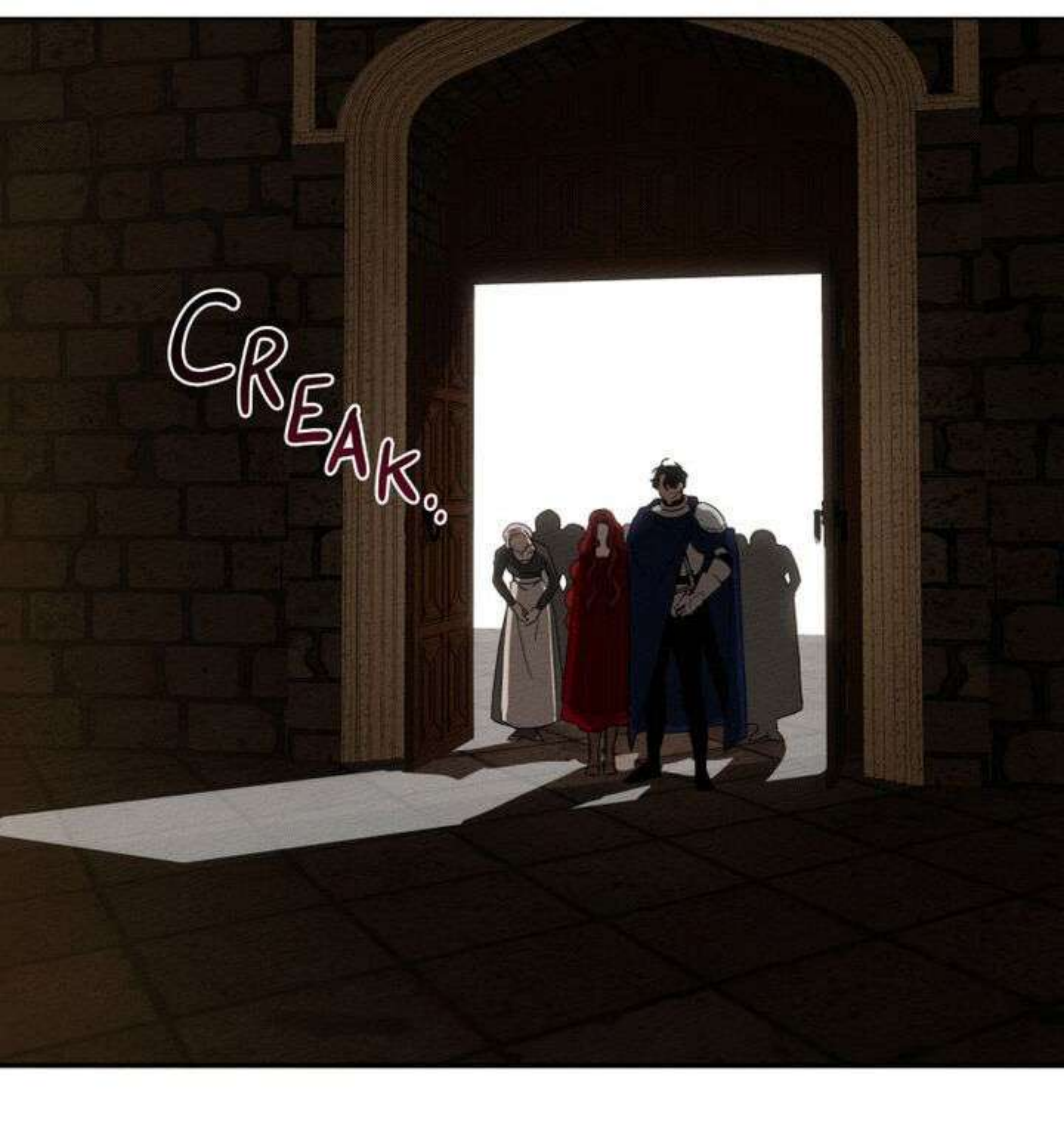

IF I MAY ASK, MY LORD. THIS LADY IS...?
MY WIFE. I WENT TO FETCH HER AS SOON AS I RETURNED.
...!

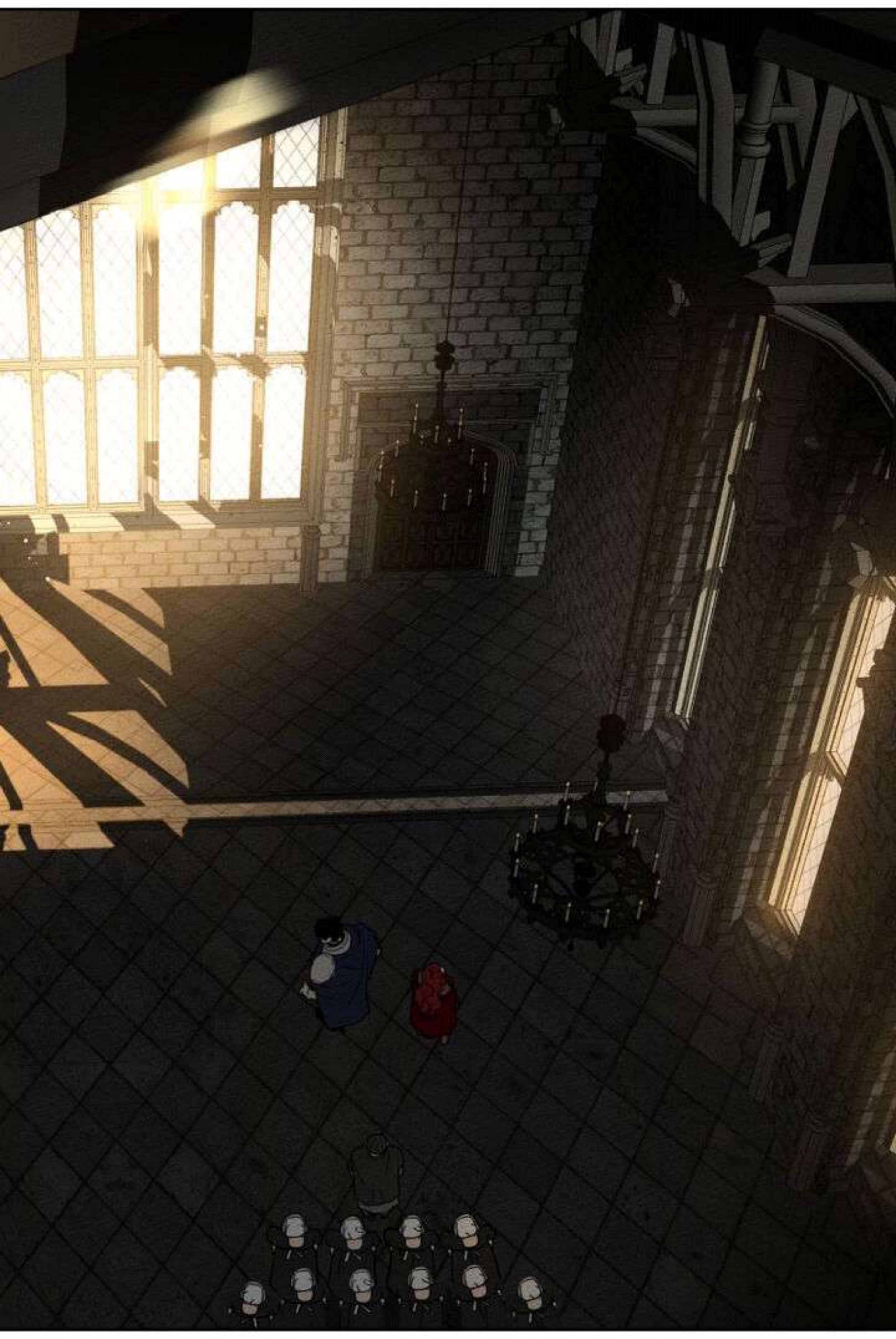

SLIDE

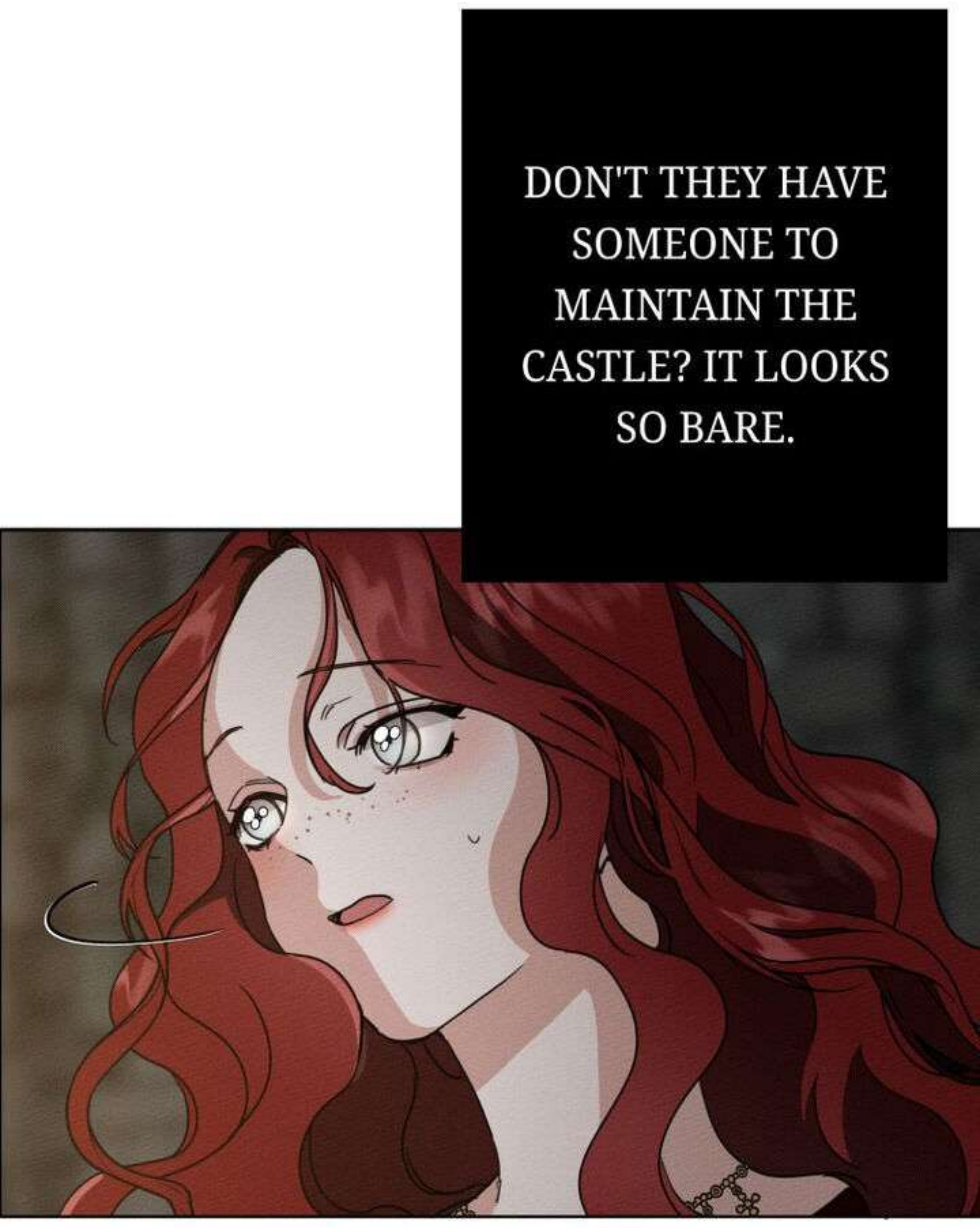

N-NICE TO M-MEET YOU.
I'M MAXIMILIAN... C - CALYPSE.

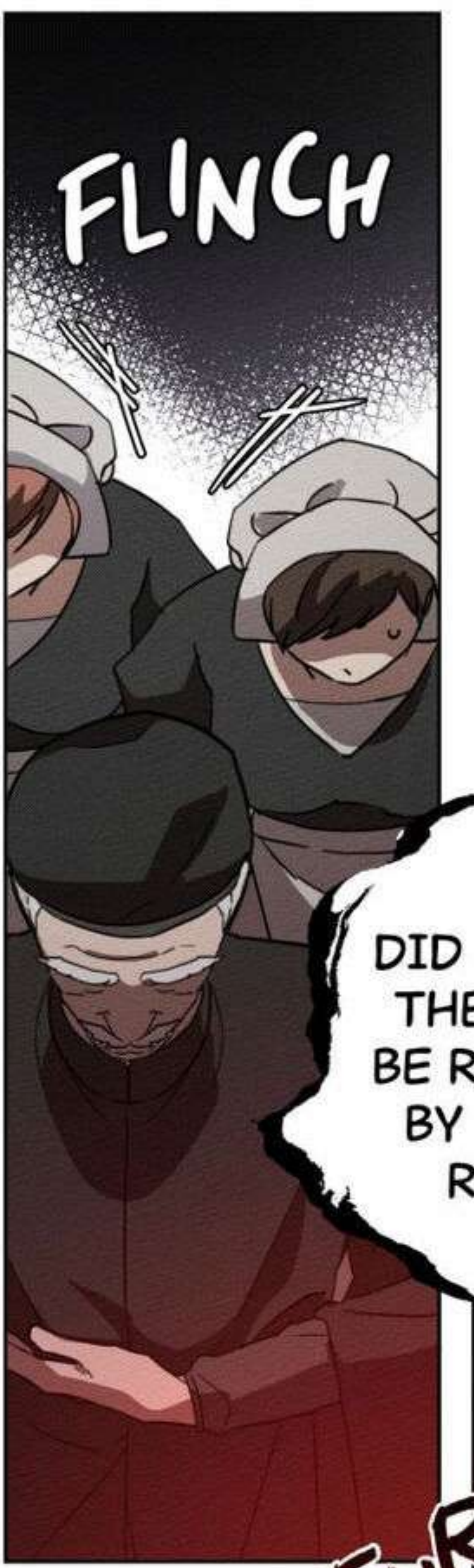

SAVE THE INTRODUCTIONS FOR LATER. LET'S HEAD IN FIRST.
STEP
STEP

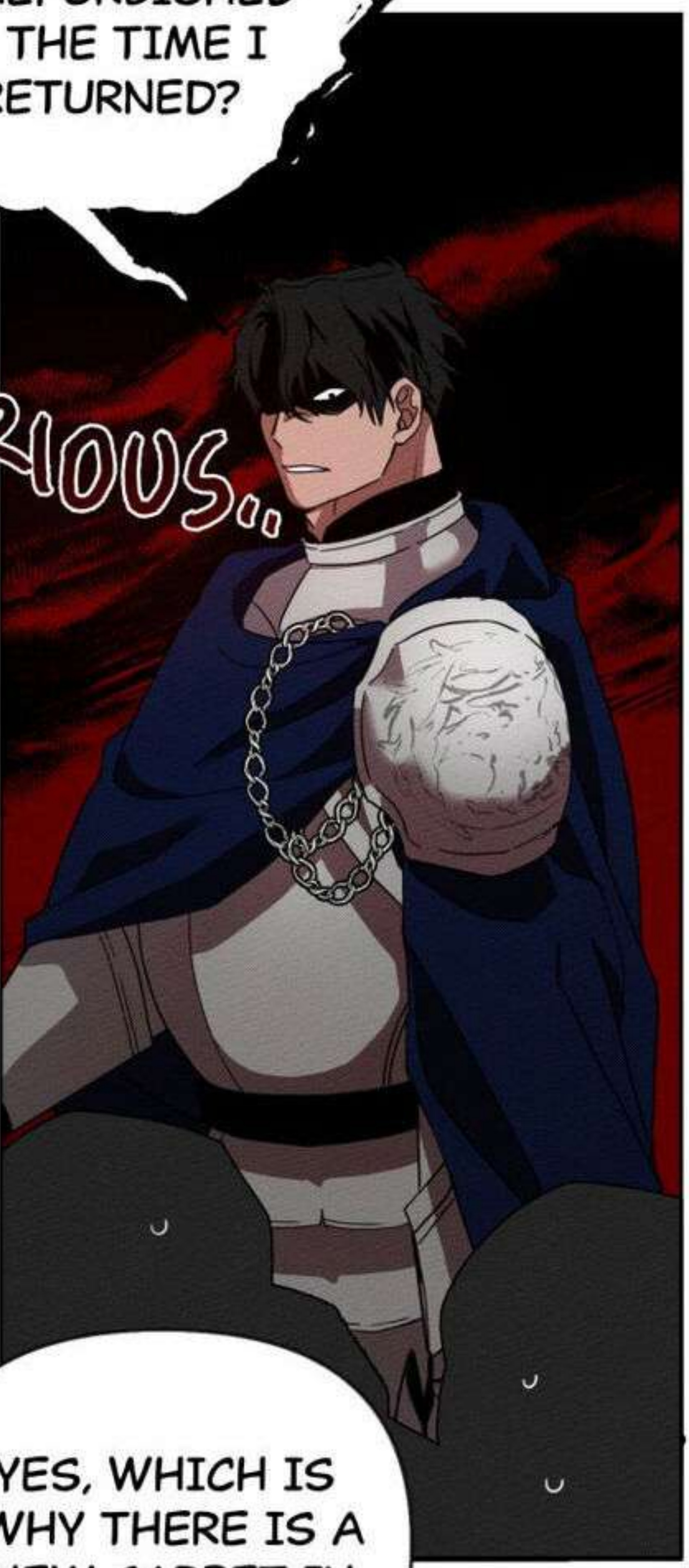
STEP
STEP

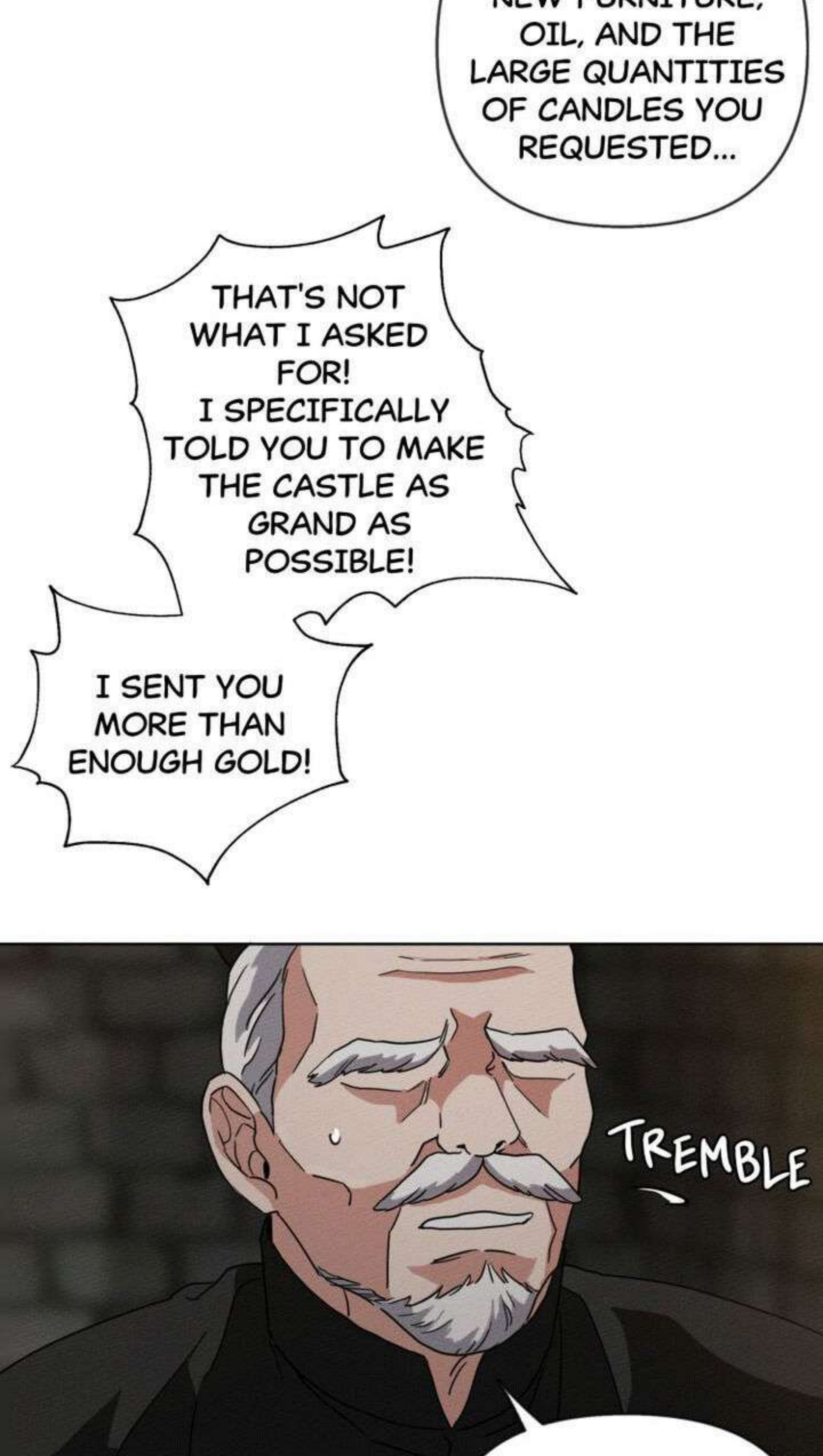

CREAK..



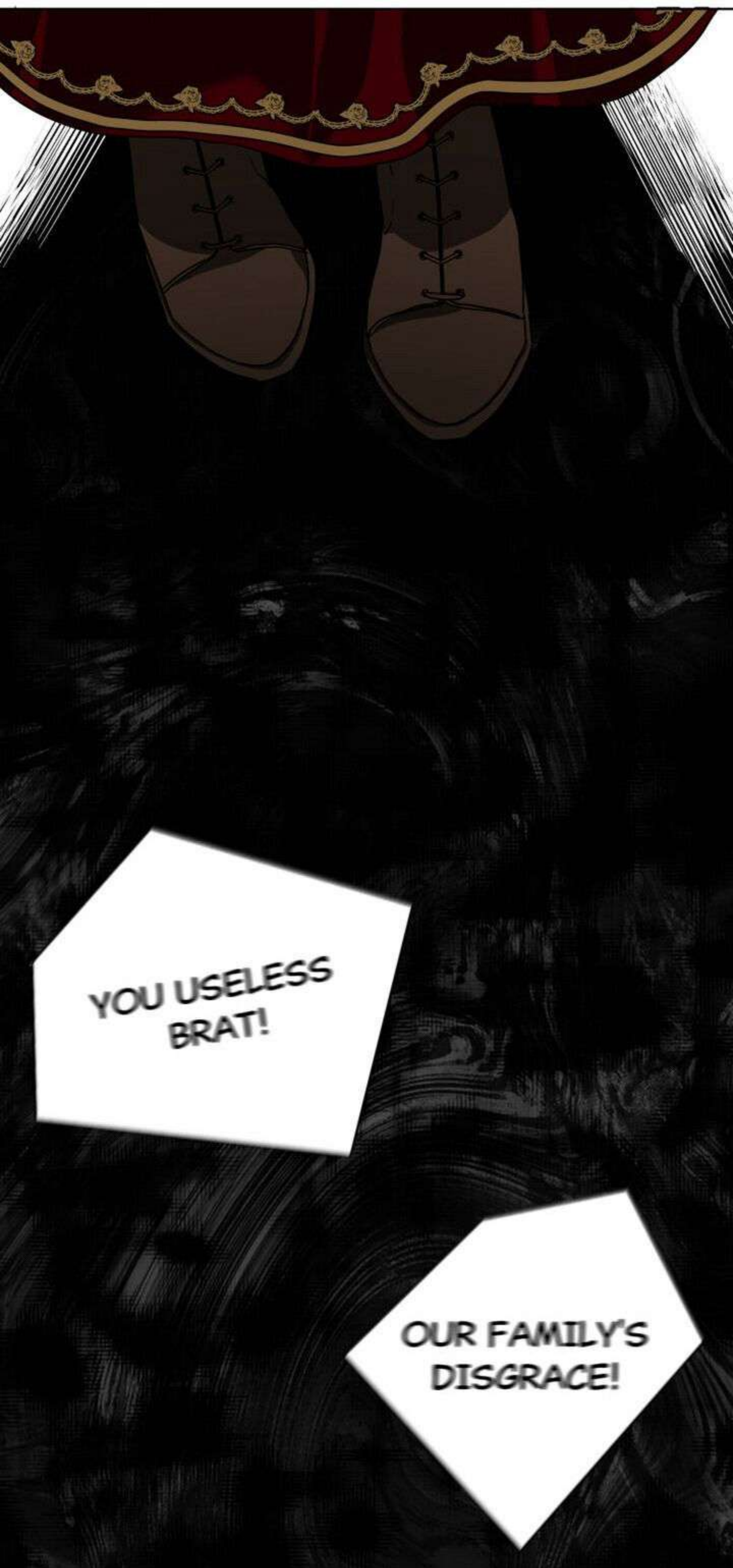

DON'T THEY HAVE SOMEONE TO MAINTAIN THE CASTLE? IT LOOKS SO BARE.
WHAT HAPPENED HERE?


FLINCH
DID I NOT ORDER THE CASTLE TO BE REFURBISHED BY THE TIME I RETURNED?

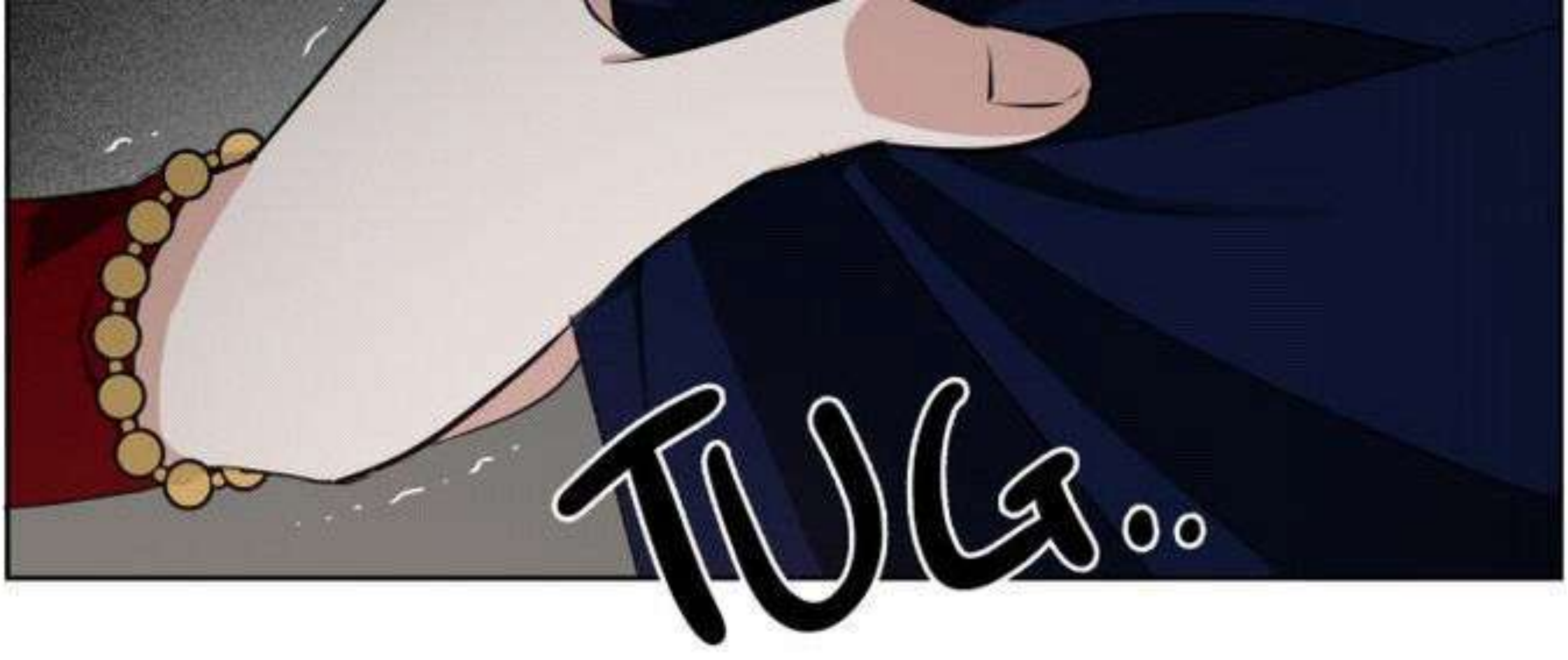

FURIOUS..
YES, WHICH IS WHY THERE IS A NEW CARPET IN THE PARLOR,
ALONG WITH NEW FURNITURE, OIL, AND THE LARGE QUANTITIES OF CANDLES YOU REQUESTED...
THAT'S NOT WHAT I ASKED FOR! I SPECIFICALLY TOLD YOU TO MAKE THE CASTLE AS GRAND AS POSSIBLE!
I SENT YOU MORE THAN ENOUGH GOLD!

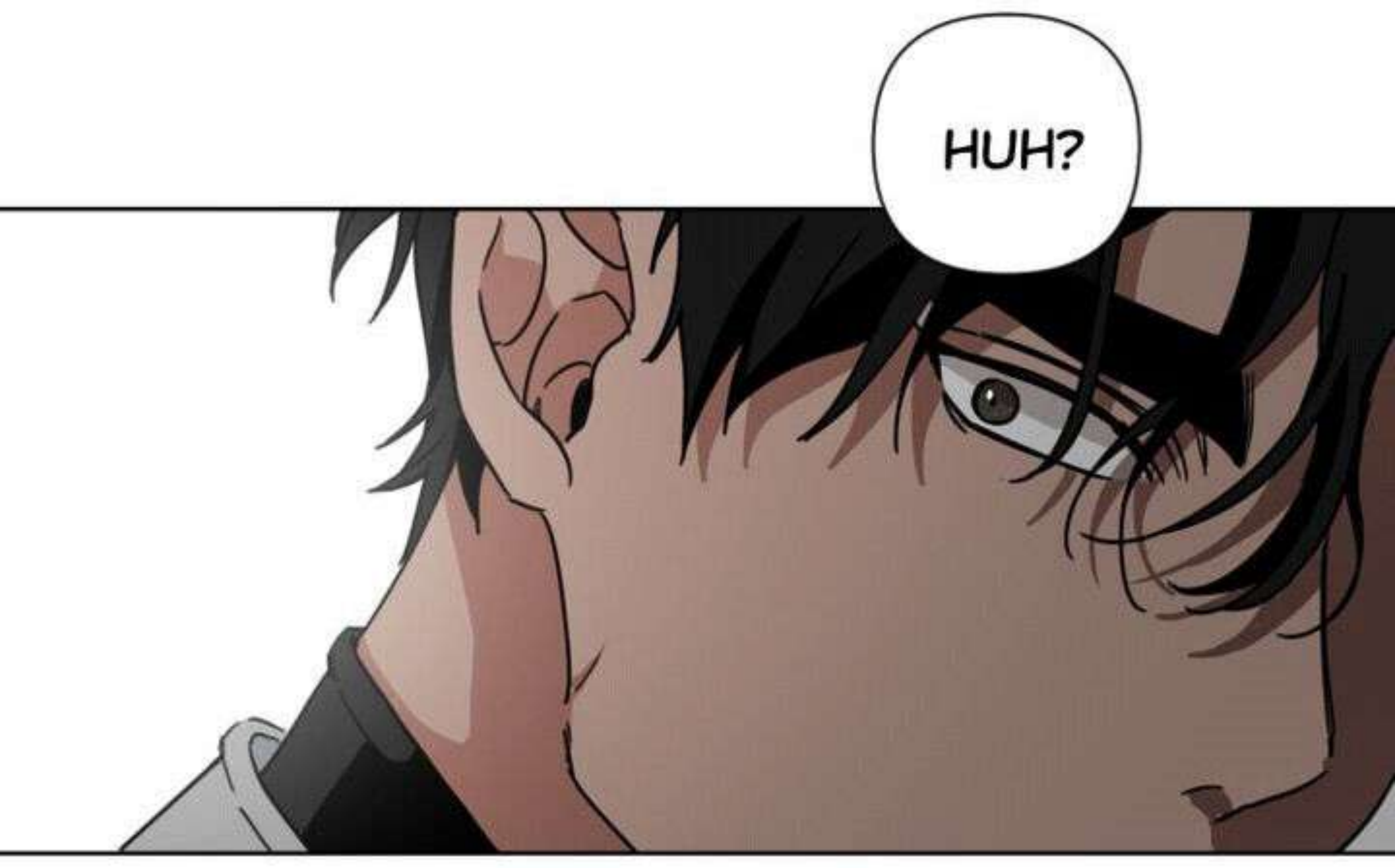

TREMBLE

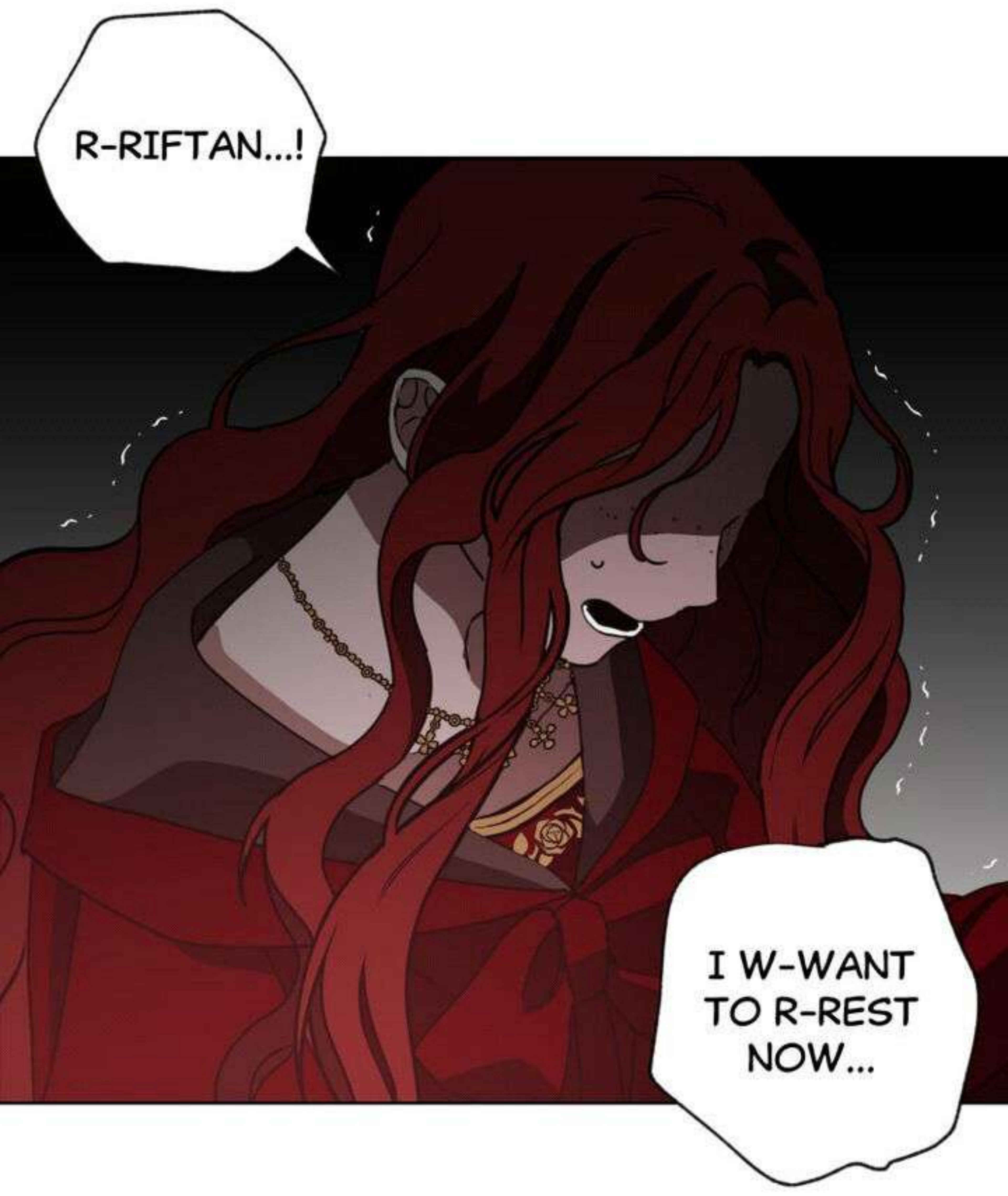
DID YOU MEAN FOR THE ENTIRE SUM TO BE USED FOR REFURBISHMENTS, MY LORD?
W-WE ARE NOT ACCUSTOMED TO SPENDING SUCH LARGE AMOUNTS OF GOLD...
I SAID I'D LEAVE IT IN YOUR HANDS! HOW COULD YOU LET THIS HAPPEN?!
W-WE DID OUR BEST TO FOLLOW YOUR REQUESTS.
WE EVEN REPLACED THE BEDS SO THAT YOU COULD REST AS SOON AS YOU RETURNED...
I'M SCARED. THIS ATMOSPHERE... IT'S HARD TO BREATHE.

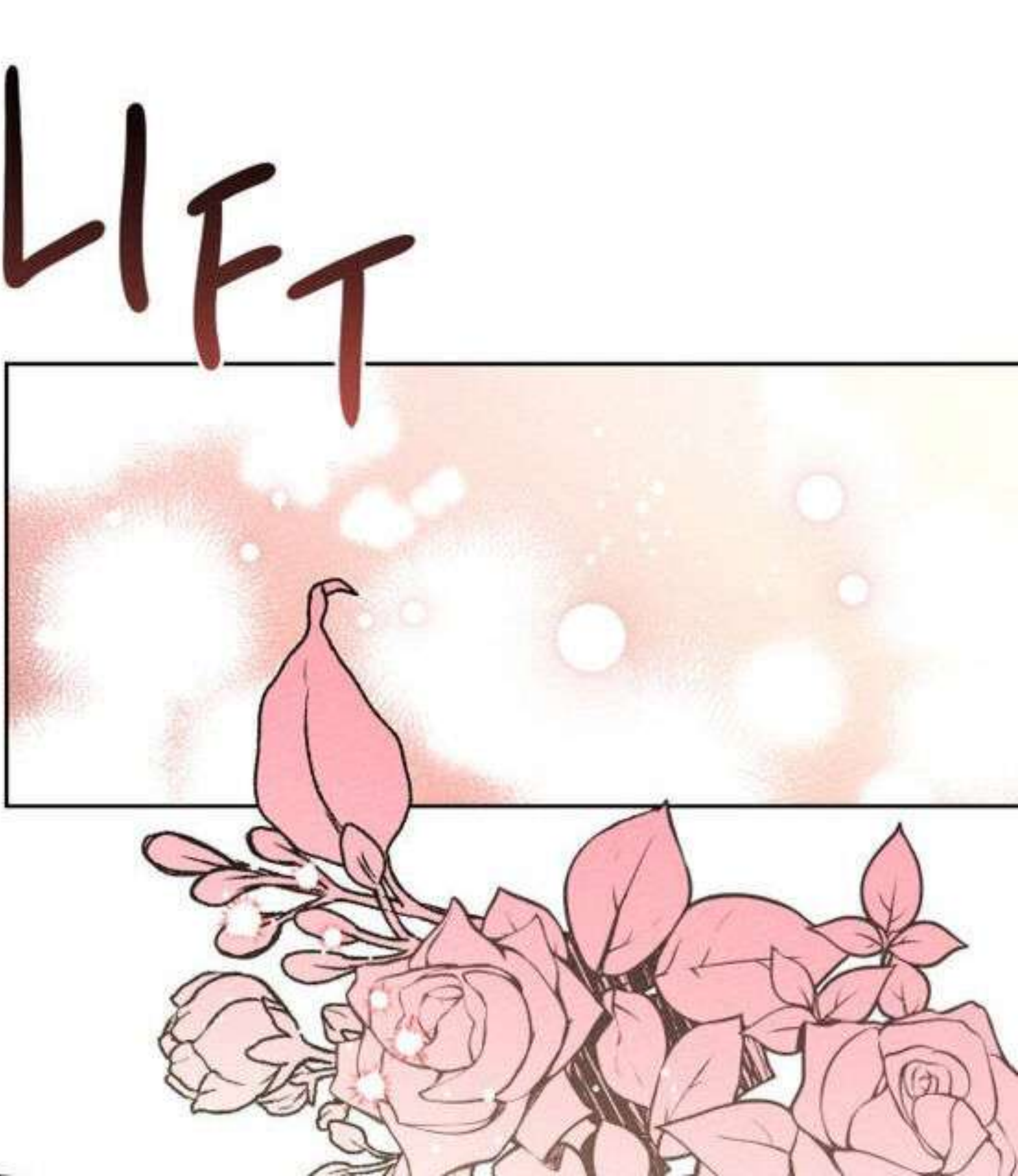

YOU USELESS BRAT!
OUR FAMILY'S DISGRACE!
I CAN'T TAKE THIS.

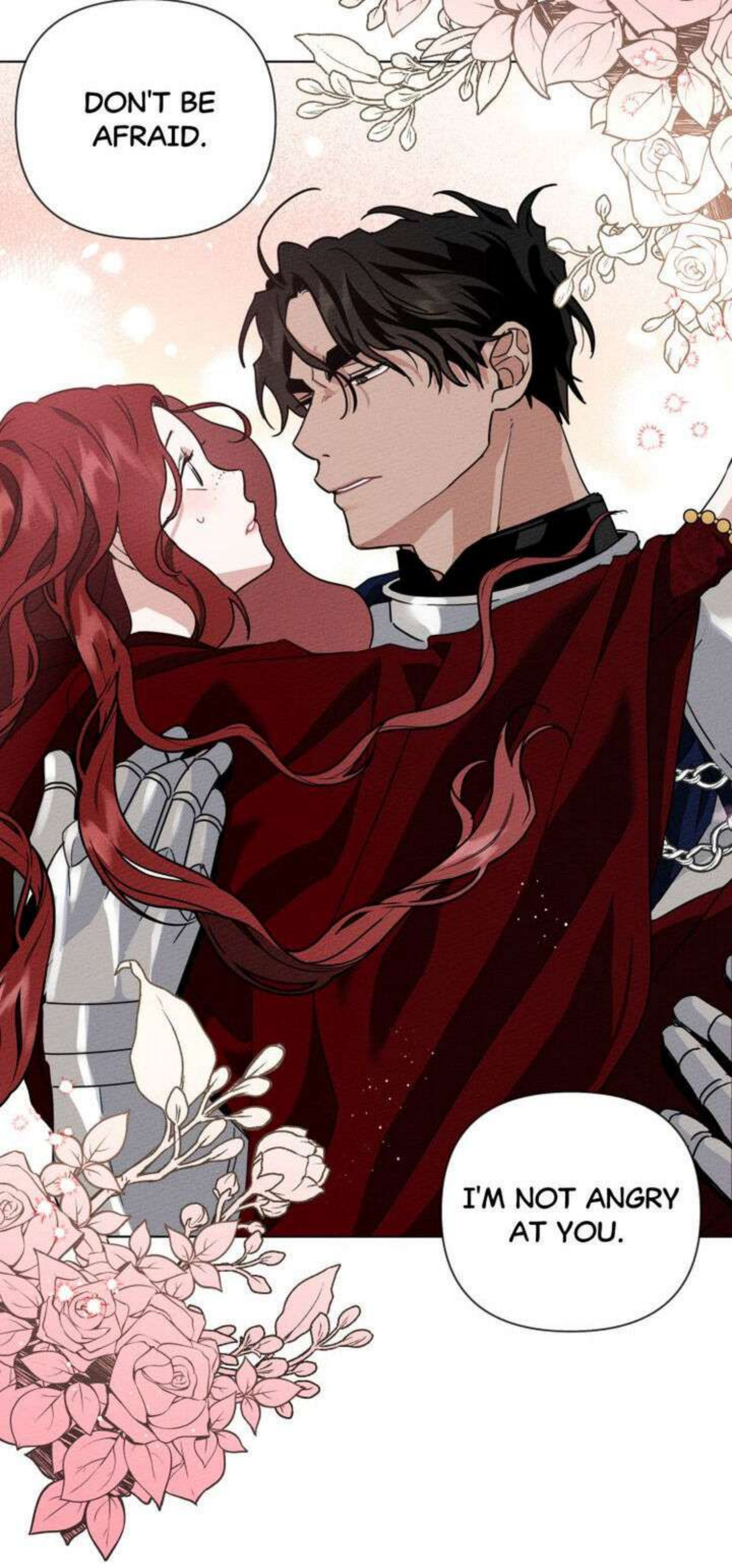
YOU DARE MAKE EXCUSES FO–!

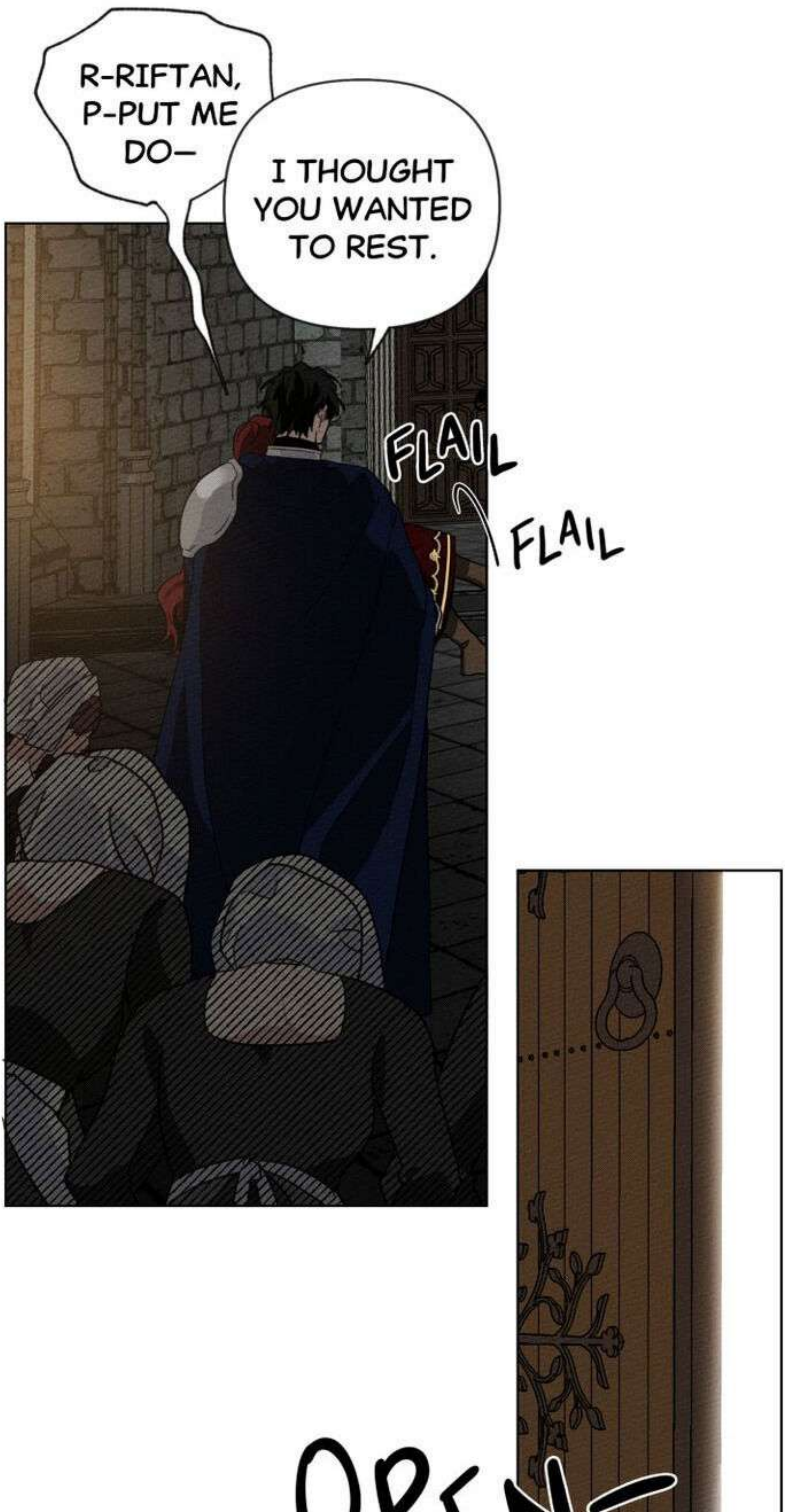

TUG..


HUH?

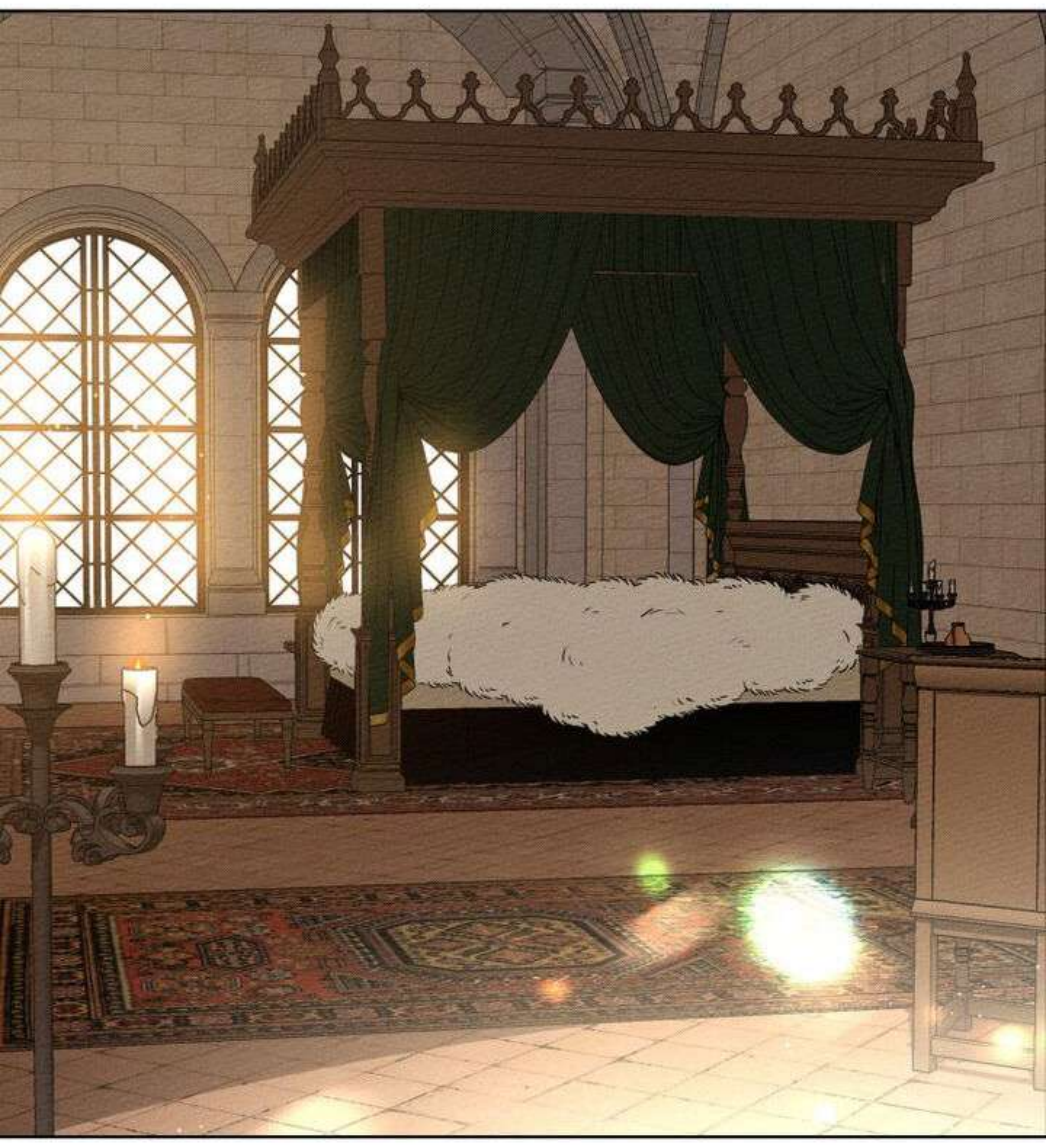

R-RIFTAN...!
I W-WANT TO R-REST NOW...

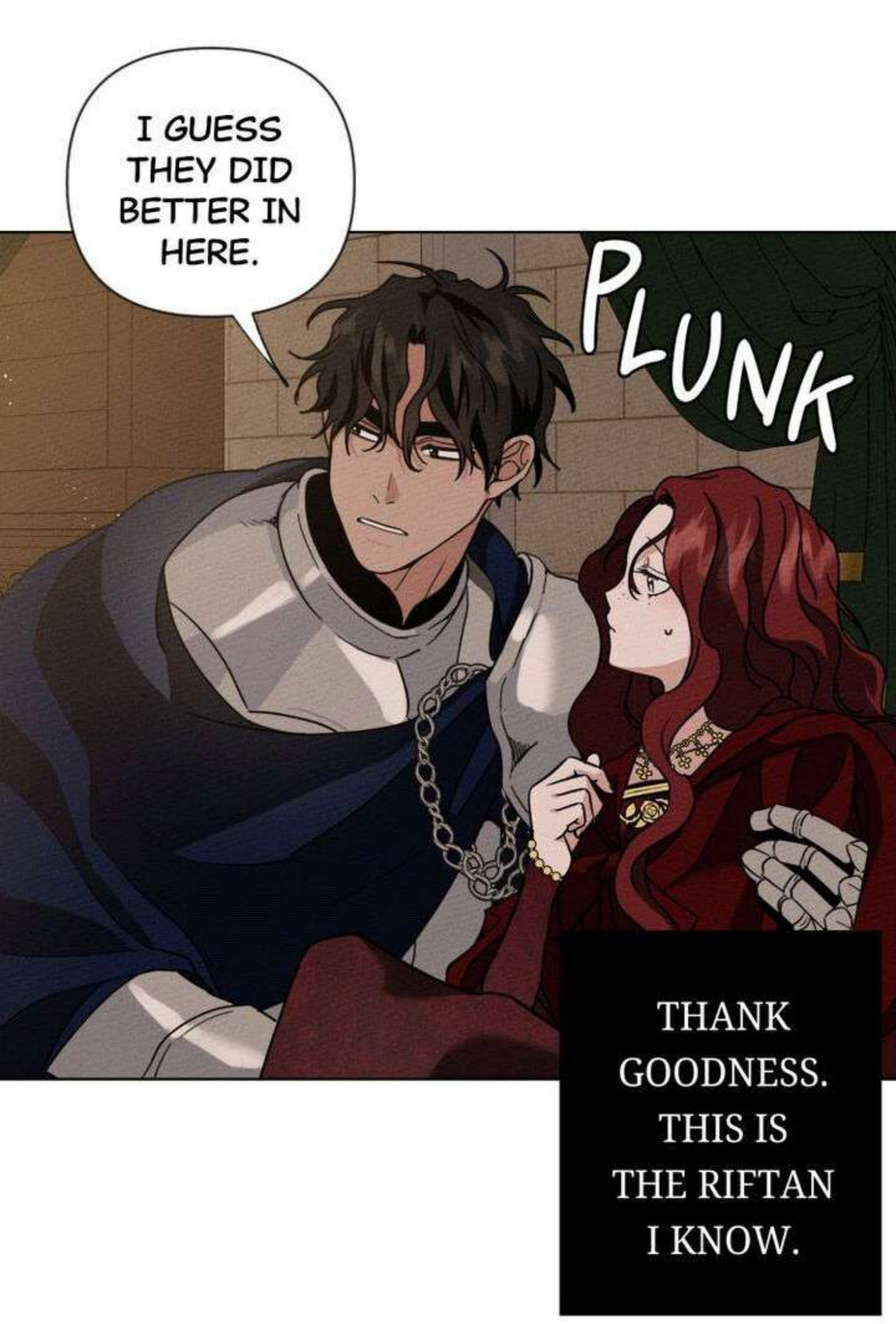

LIFT

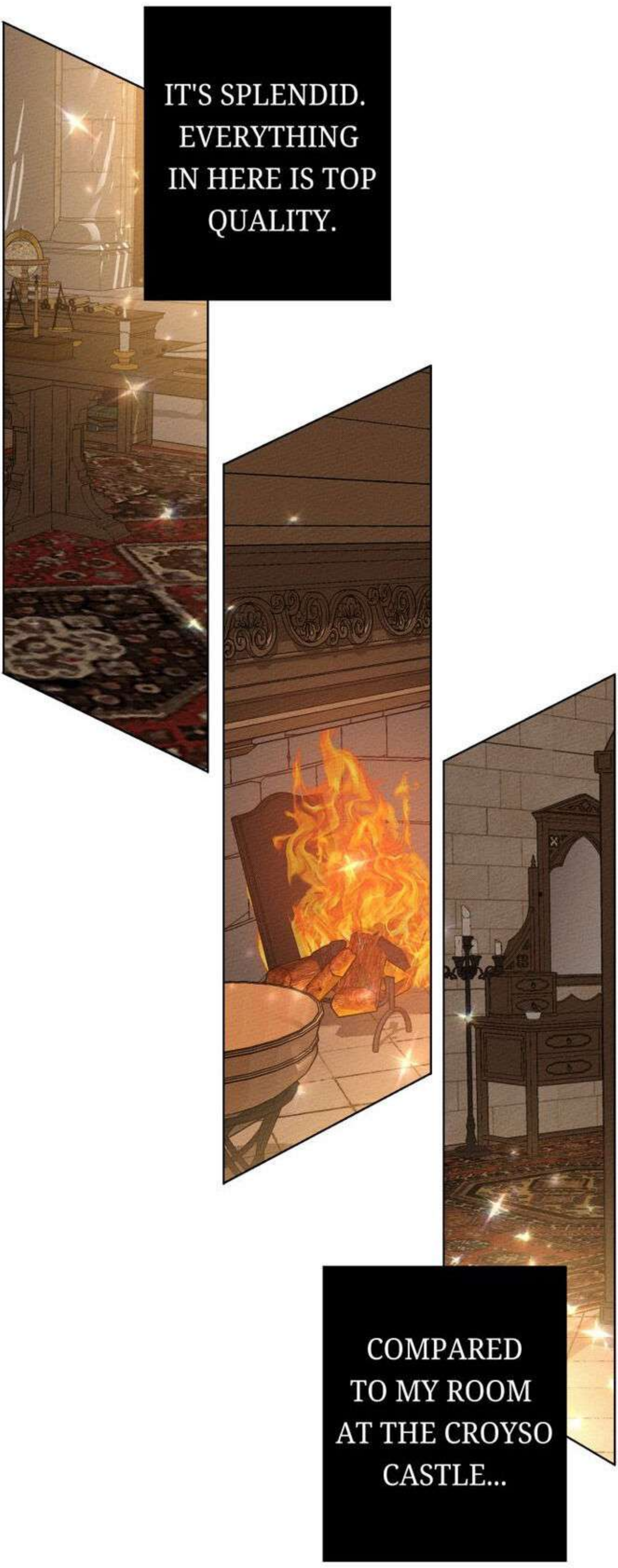

DON'T BE AFRAID.
I'M NOT ANGRY AT YOU.


R-RIFTAN, P-PUT ME DO—
I THOUGHT YOU WANTED TO REST.
FLAIL
FLAIL
OPE

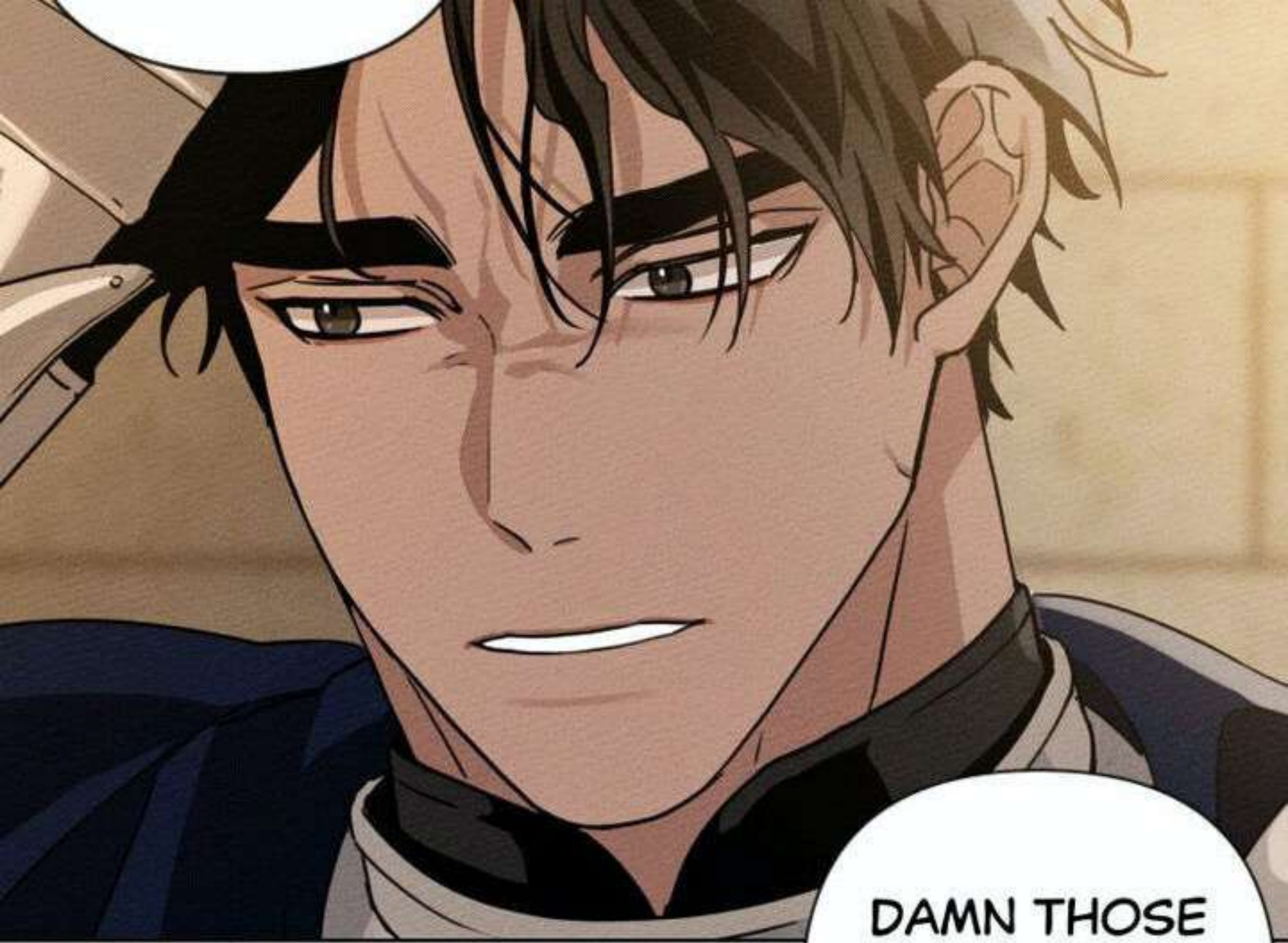
OPEN




I GUESS THEY DID BETTER IN HERE.
PLUNK
THANK GOODNESS. THIS IS THE RIFTAN I KNOW.

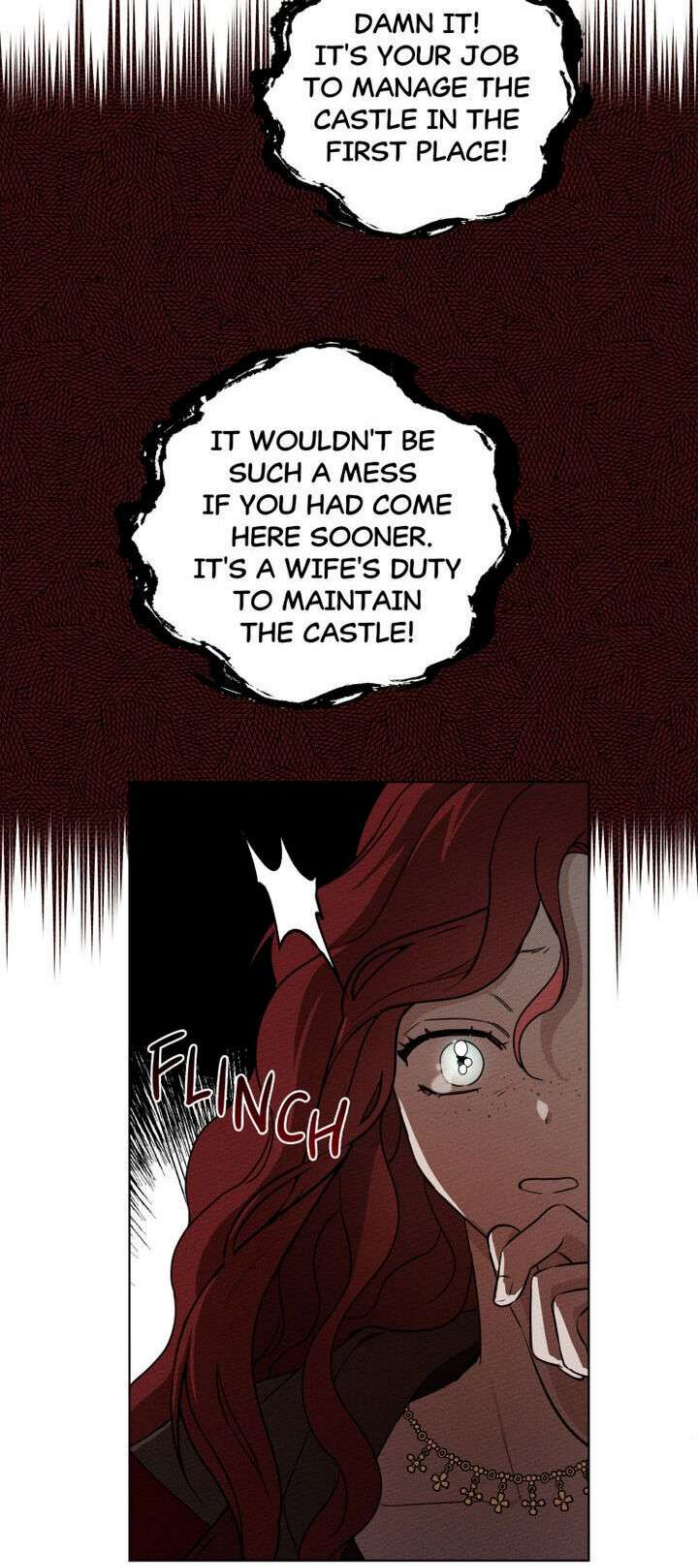

IT'S SPLENDID. EVERYTHING IN HERE IS TOP QUALITY.
COMPARED TO MY ROOM AT THE CROYSO CASTLE...

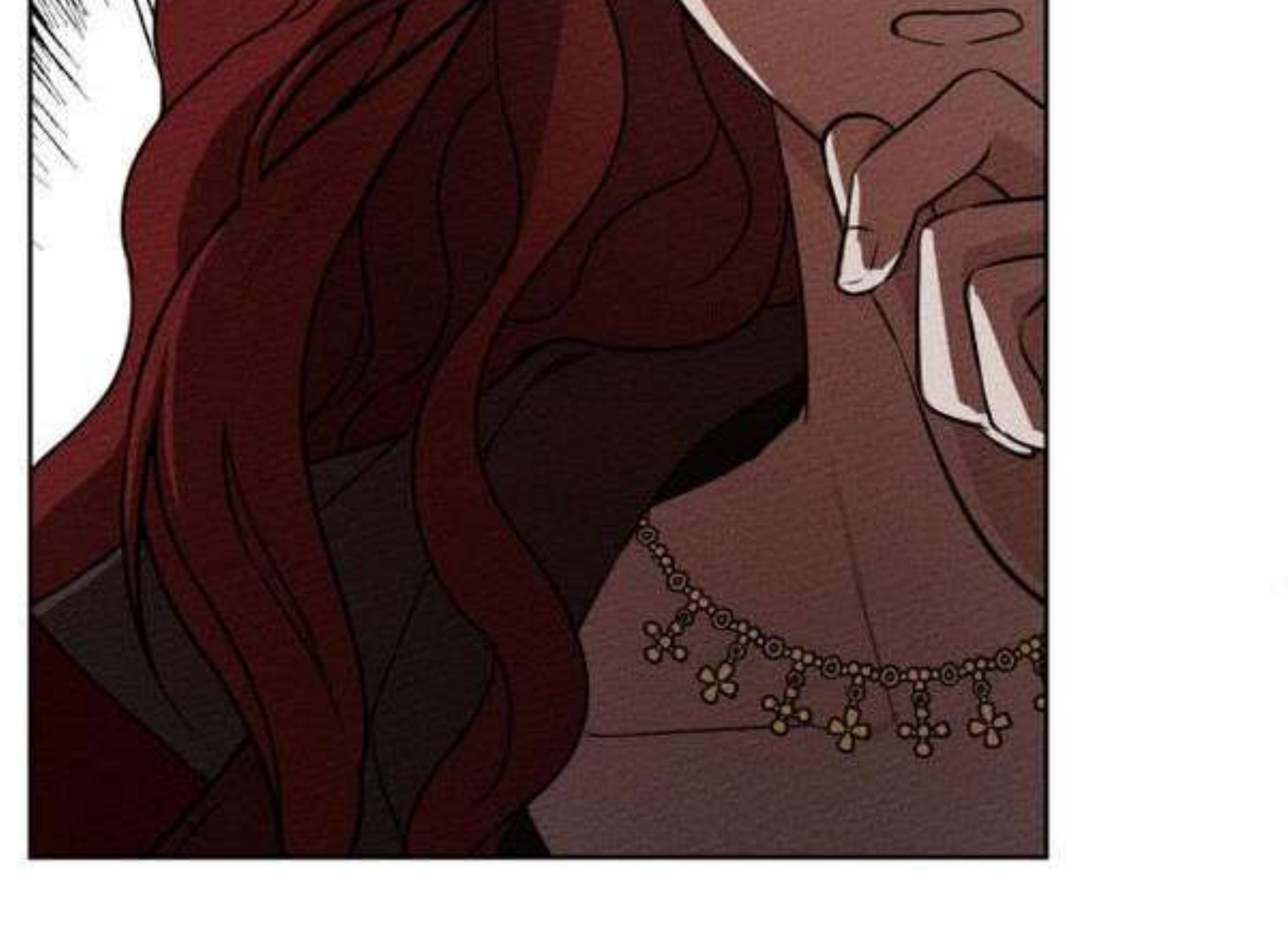
EVERYTHING HERE MUST SEEM SO SHABBY IN YOUR EYES.



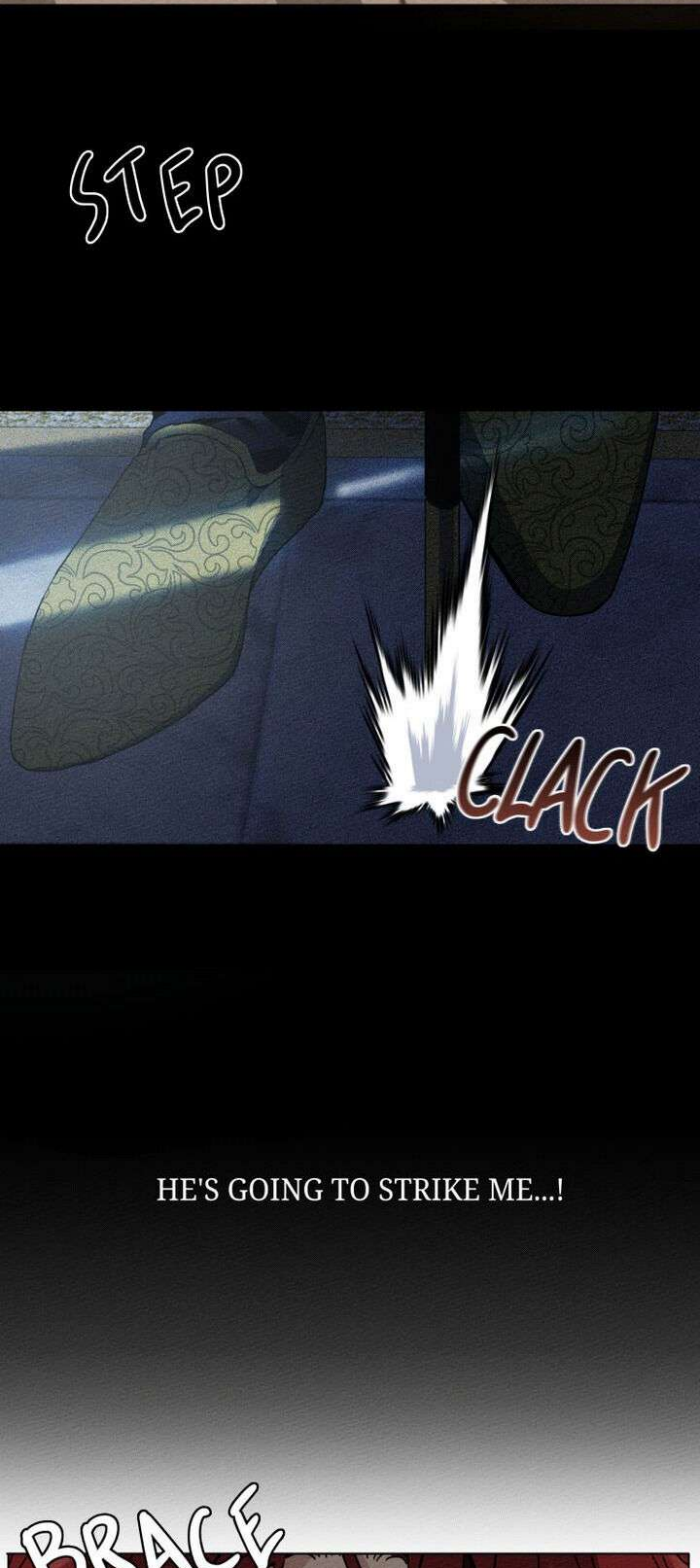
DAMN THOSE WRETCHES. I CLEARLY TOLD THEM...

N-NO, TH-THIS ROOM IS LOVELY.
THE C-CASTLE, TOO... AND THE B-BED IS W-WONDERFUL.
DON'T BOTHER. I'VE SEEN THE CROYSO CASTLE ENOUGH TIMES TO KNOW BETTER.
COMPARED TO YOUR FATHER'S CASTLE, THIS PLACE IS NOTHING MORE THAN A LOUSY BARN.
N-NO, TH-THAT'S NOT—

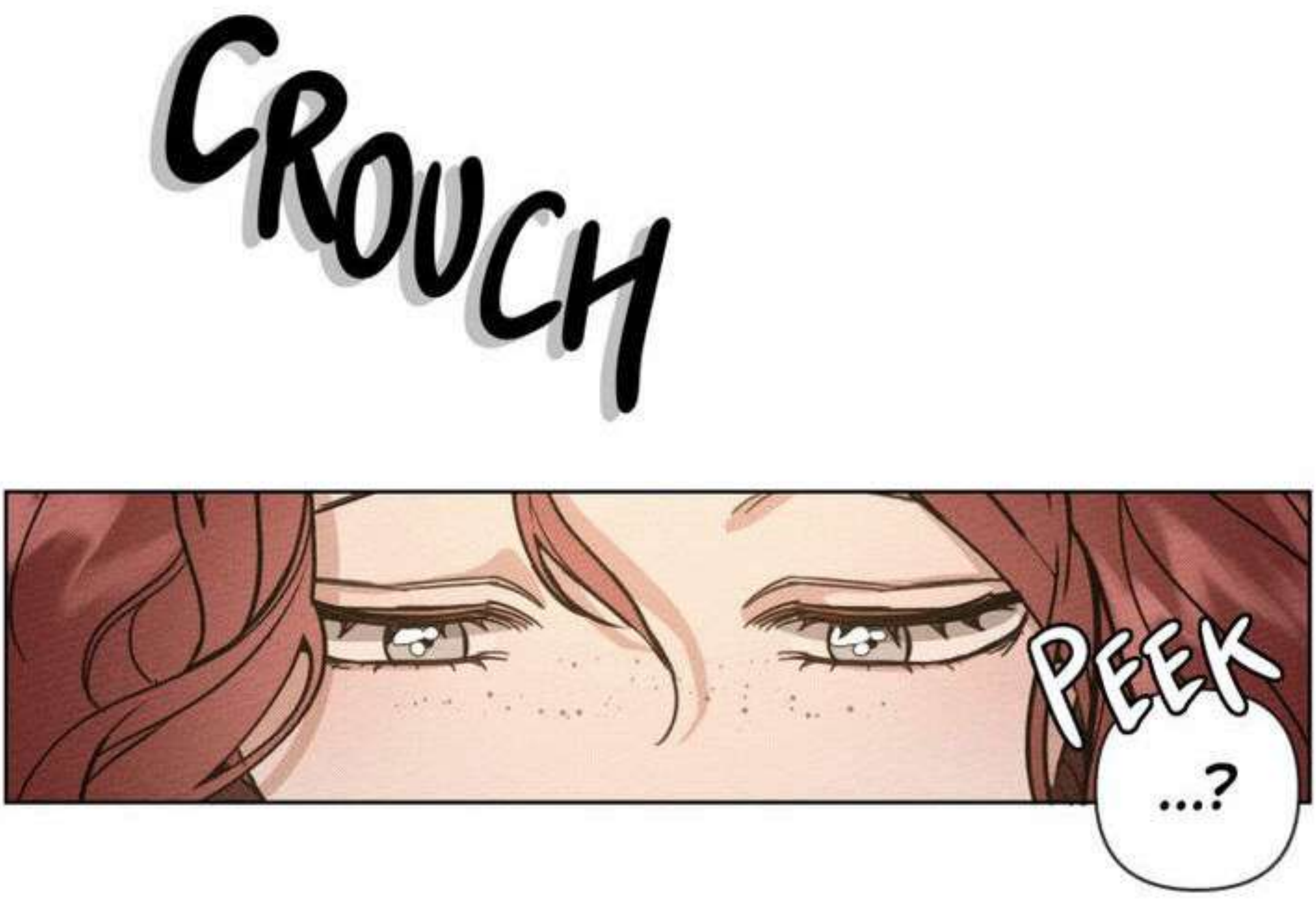

DAMN IT! IT'S YOUR JOB TO MANAGE THE CASTLE IN THE FIRST PLACE!
IT WOULDN'T BE SUCH A MESS IF YOU HAD COME HERE SOONER. IT'S A WIFE'S DUTY TO MAINTAIN THE CASTLE!
FLINCH


SO... DAMN IT. WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS,
SIGH..

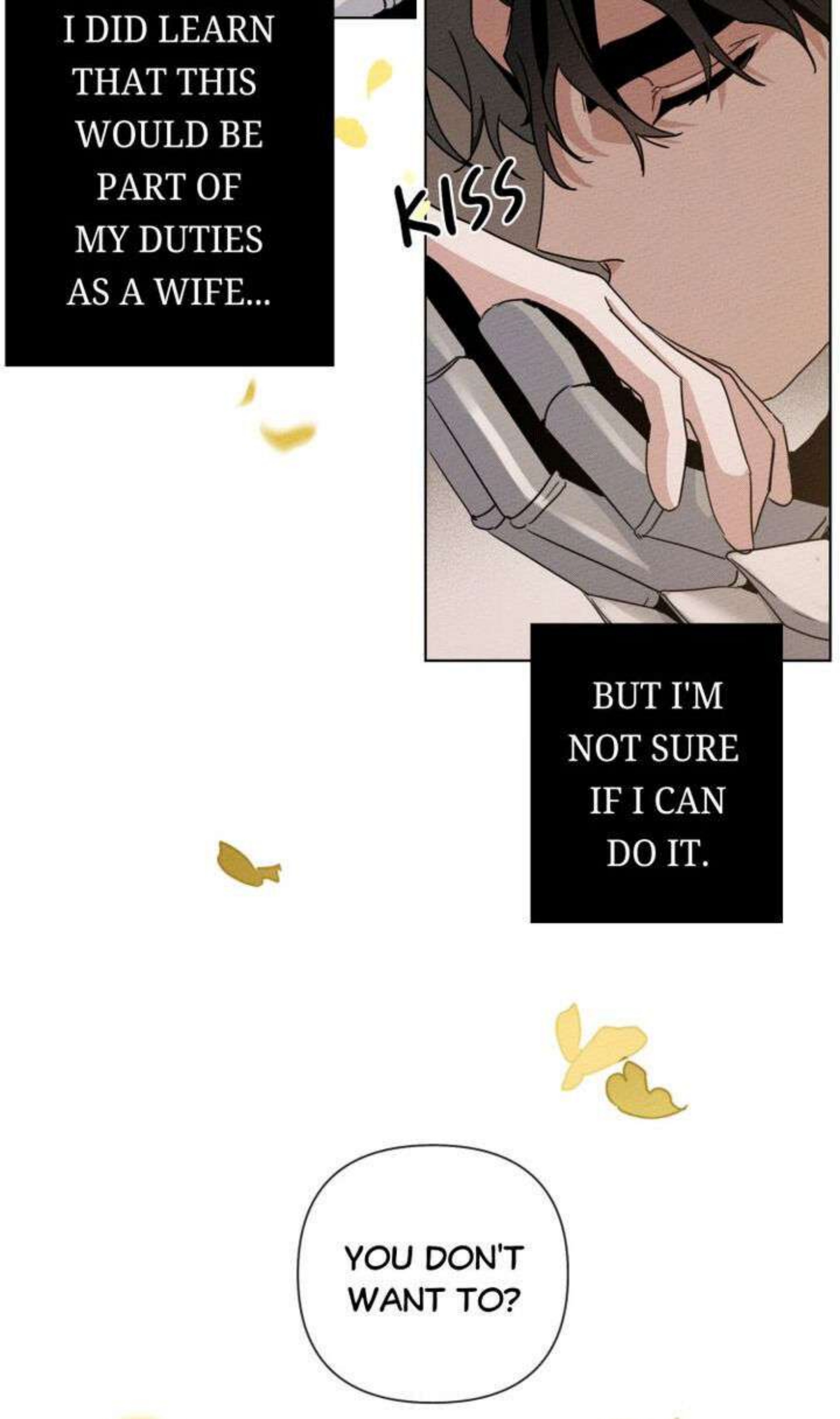
TURN
STEP

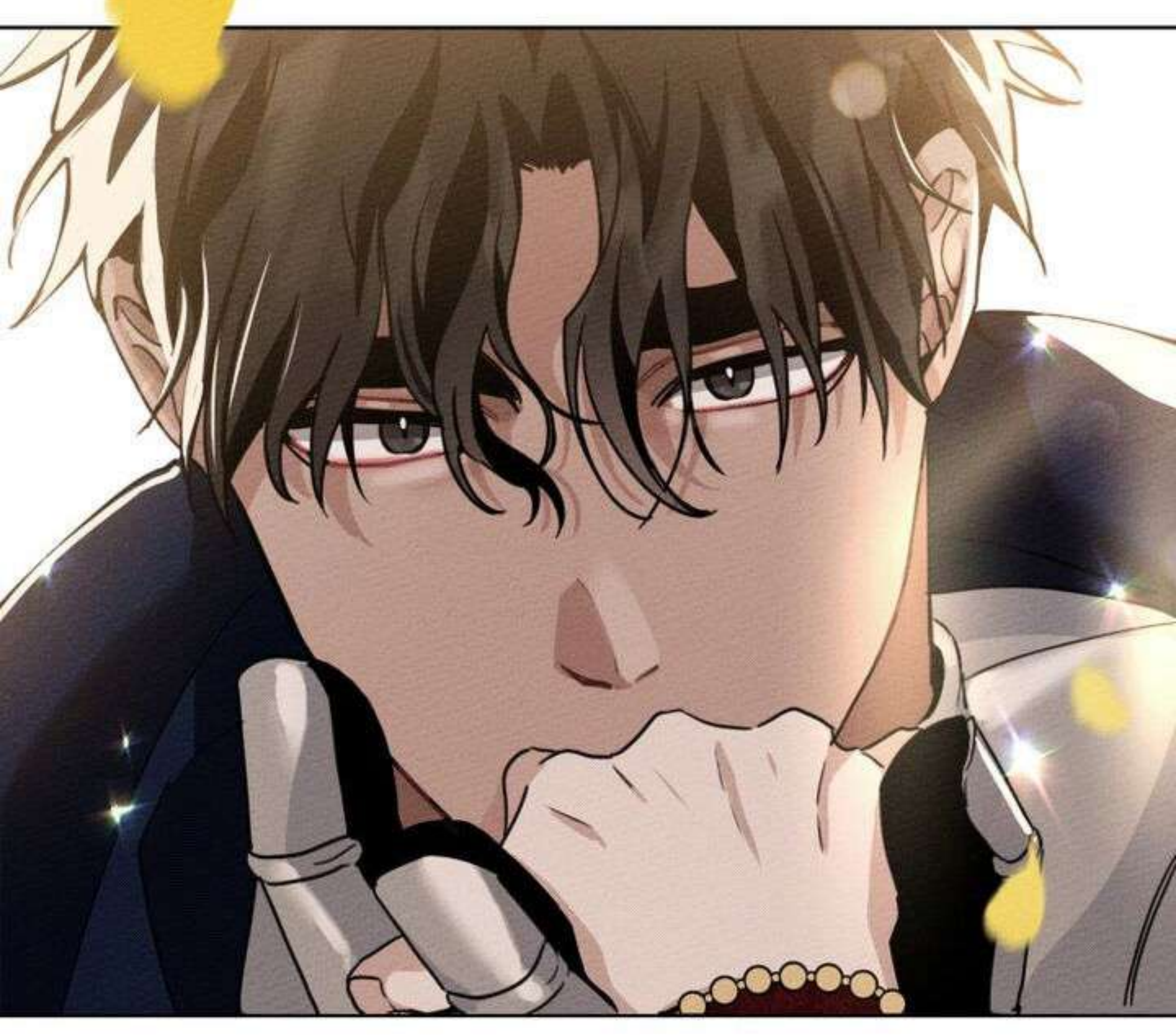

STEP
CLACK
HE'S GOING TO STRIKE ME...!

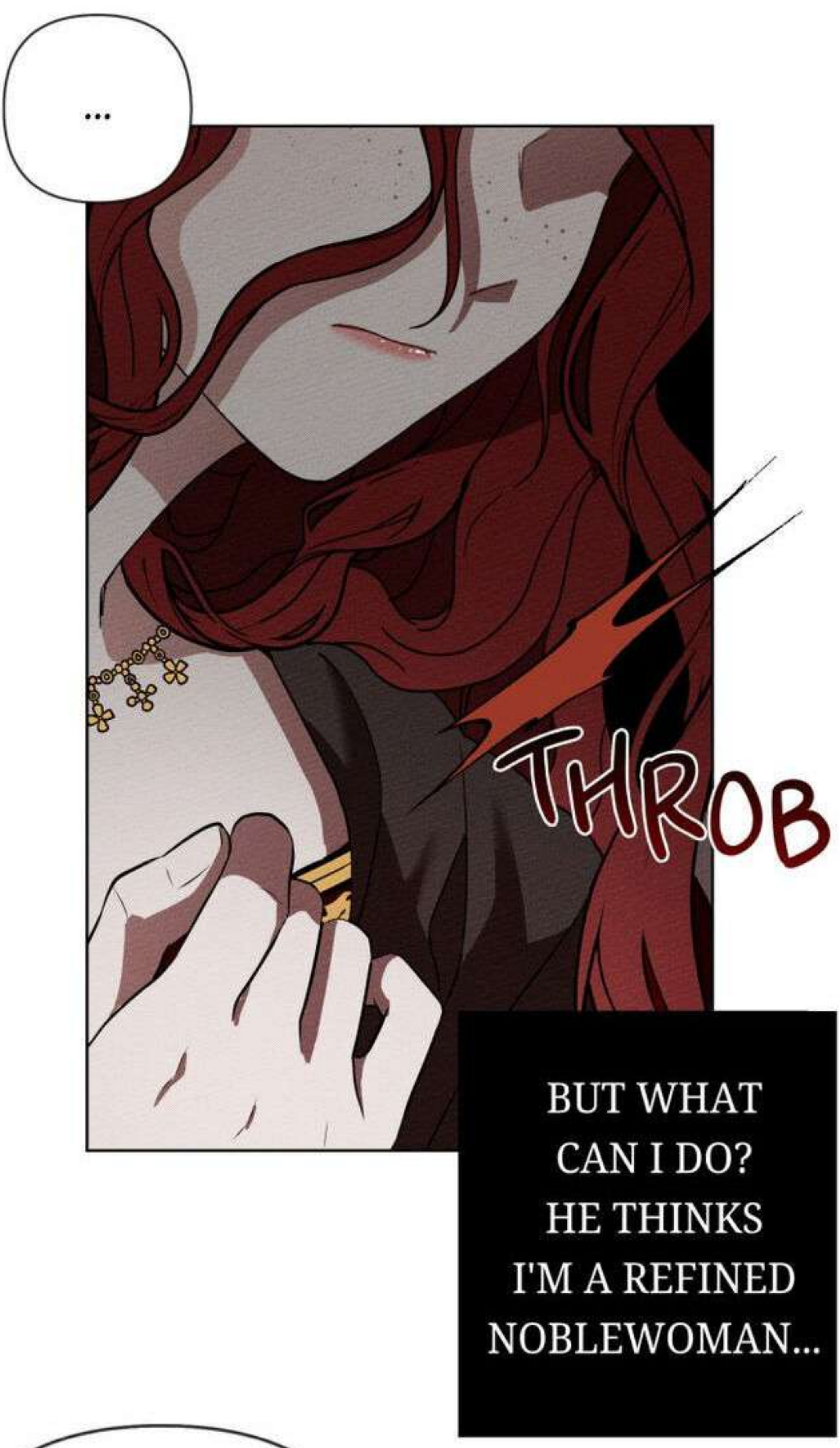
BRACE

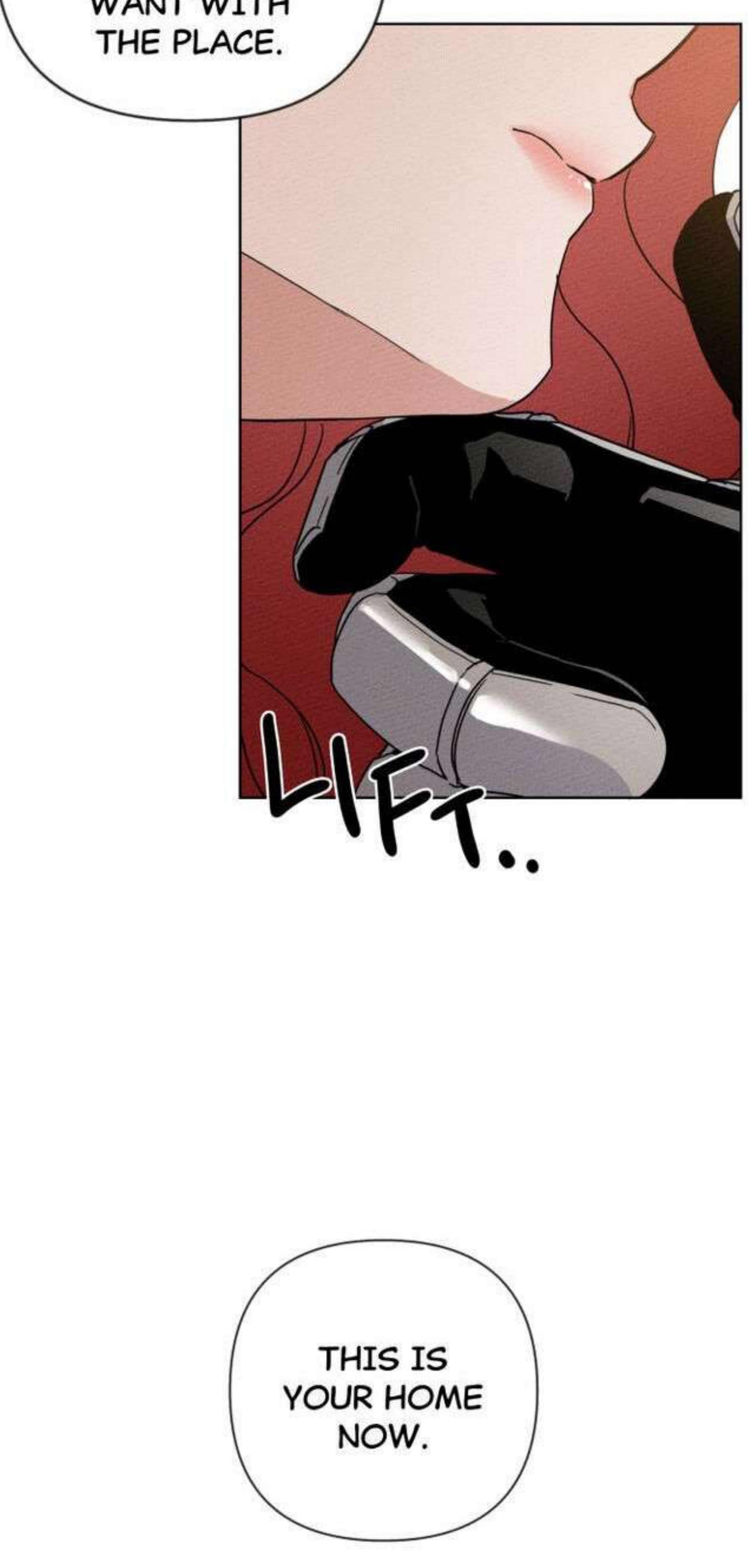

CROUCH
PEEK
...?

SINCE IT IS YOUR DUTY, COULD YOU REFURBISH THE CASTLE?
YOU CAN SPEND AS MUCH AS YOU WANT.
WOMEN LOVE DECORATING AND PICKING OUT FURNITURE, DON'T THEY?
I CAN GET YOU MORE SERVANTS, AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT MONEY.


I DID LEARN THAT THIS WOULD BE PART OF MY DUTIES AS A WIFE...
KISS
BUT I'M NOT SURE IF I CAN DO IT.
YOU DON'T WANT TO?



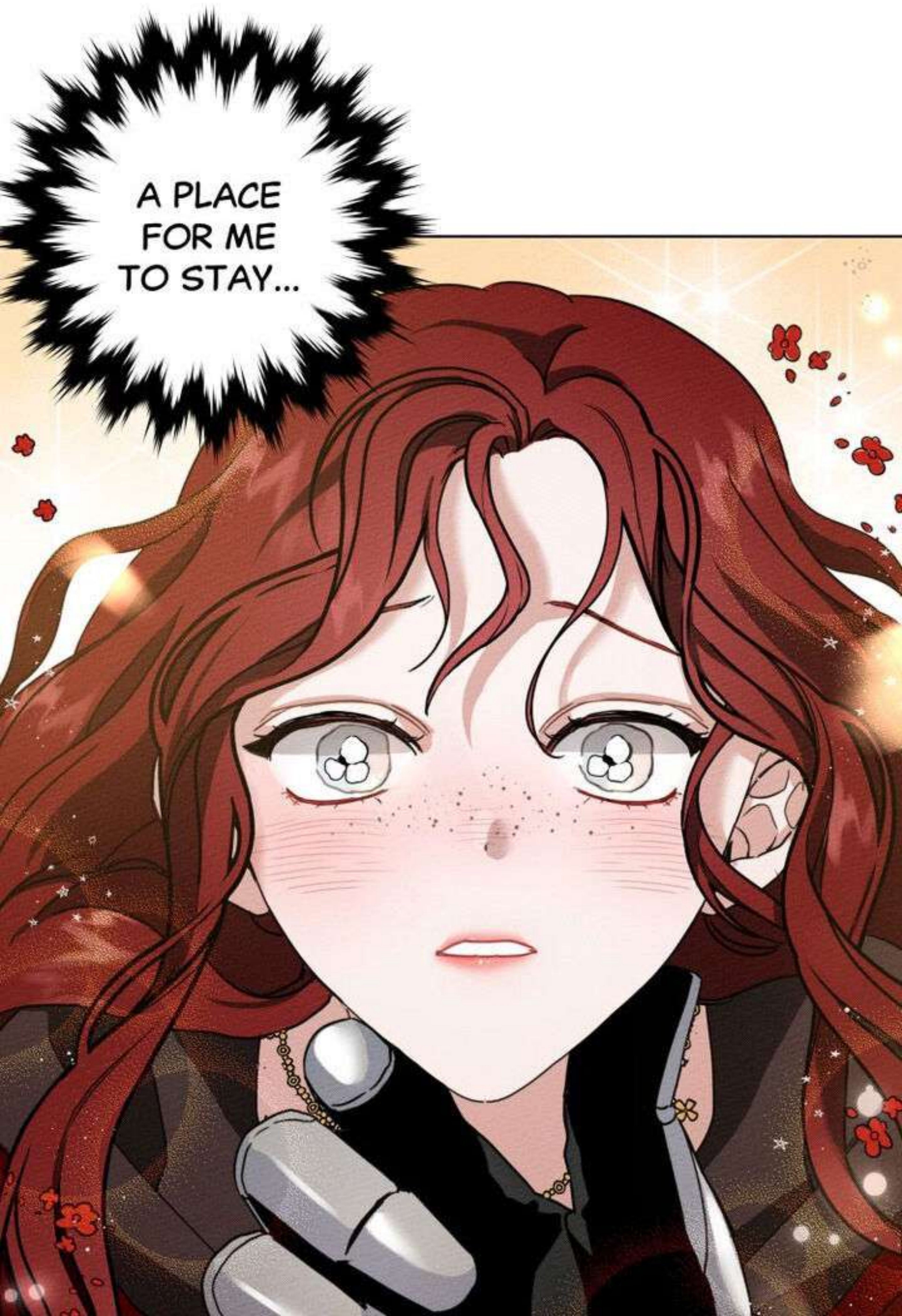

...
THROB
BUT WHAT CAN I DO? HE THINKS I'M A REFINED NOBLEWOMAN...

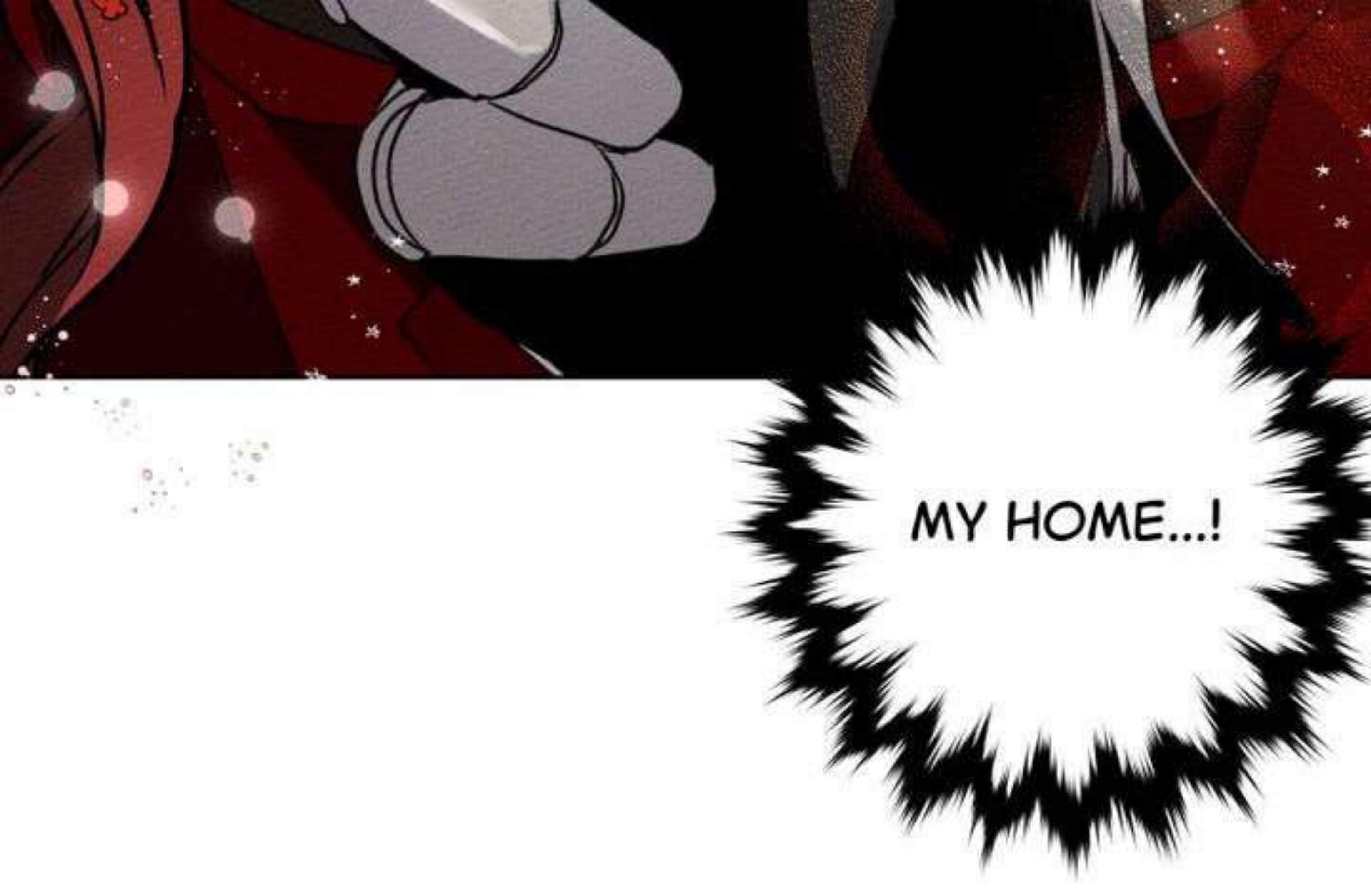

I'LL LET THE STEWARD KNOW, SO JUST DO WHATEVER YOU WANT WITH THE PLACE.
LIFT..
THIS IS YOUR HOME NOW.

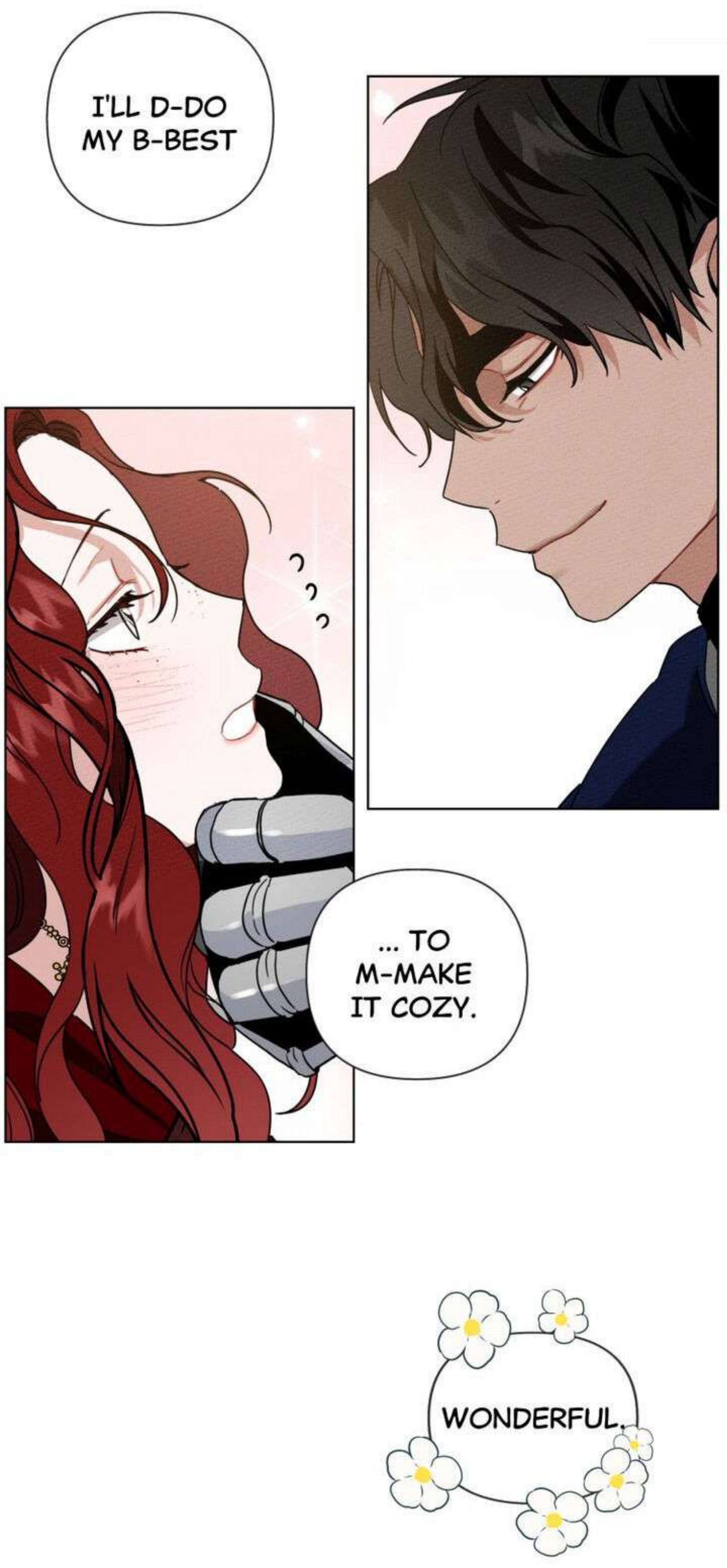
OH...

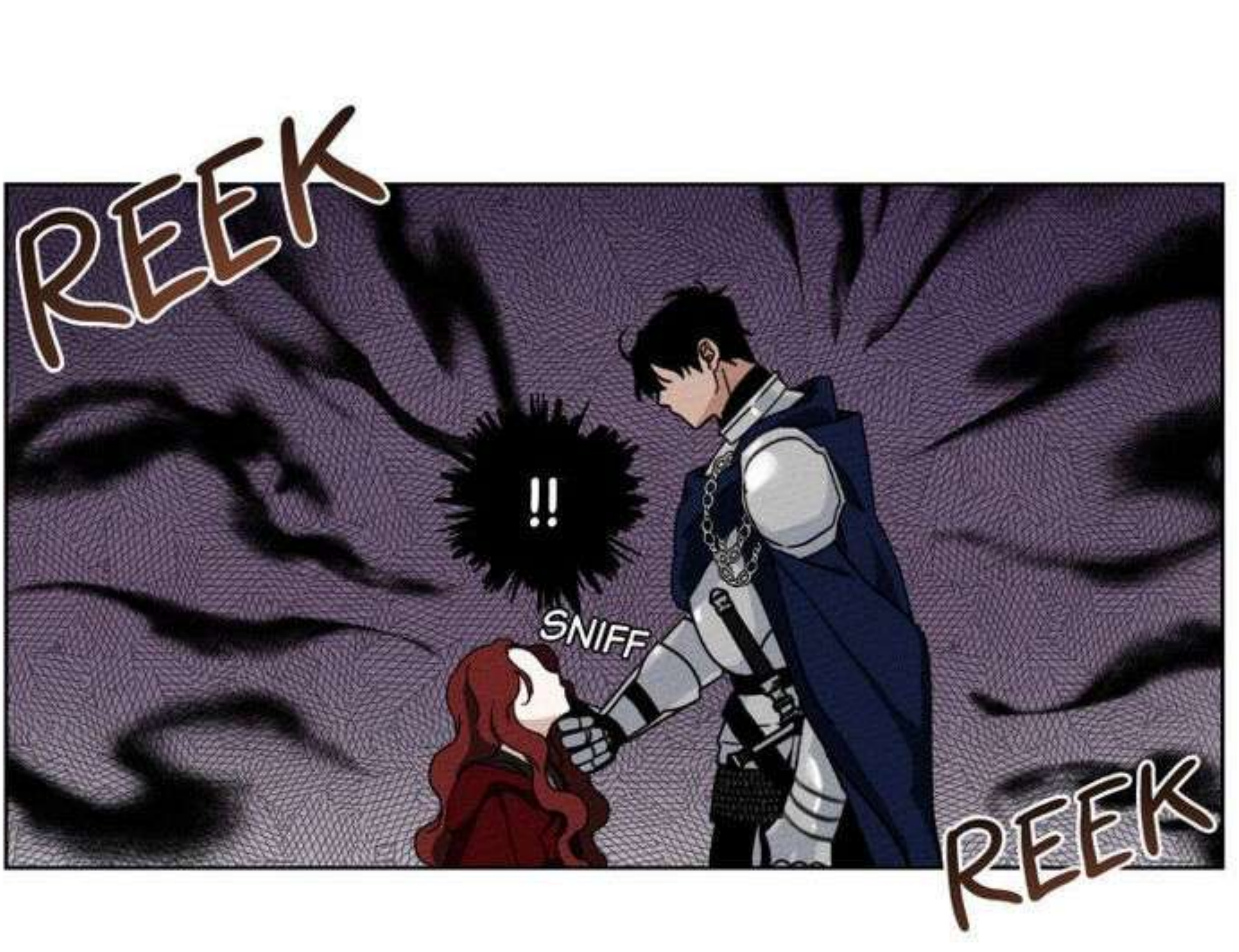
MY...

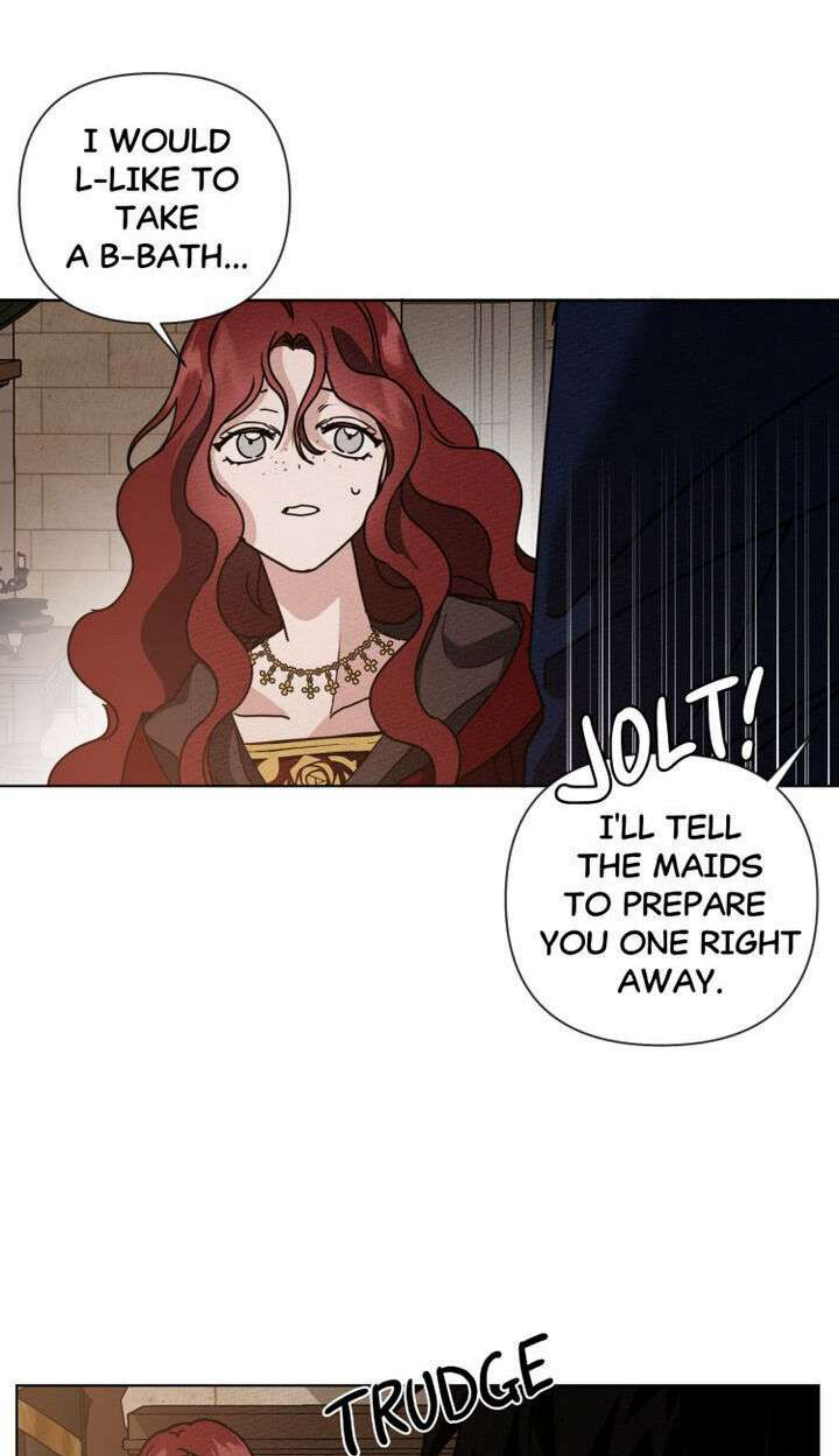
MY HOME.

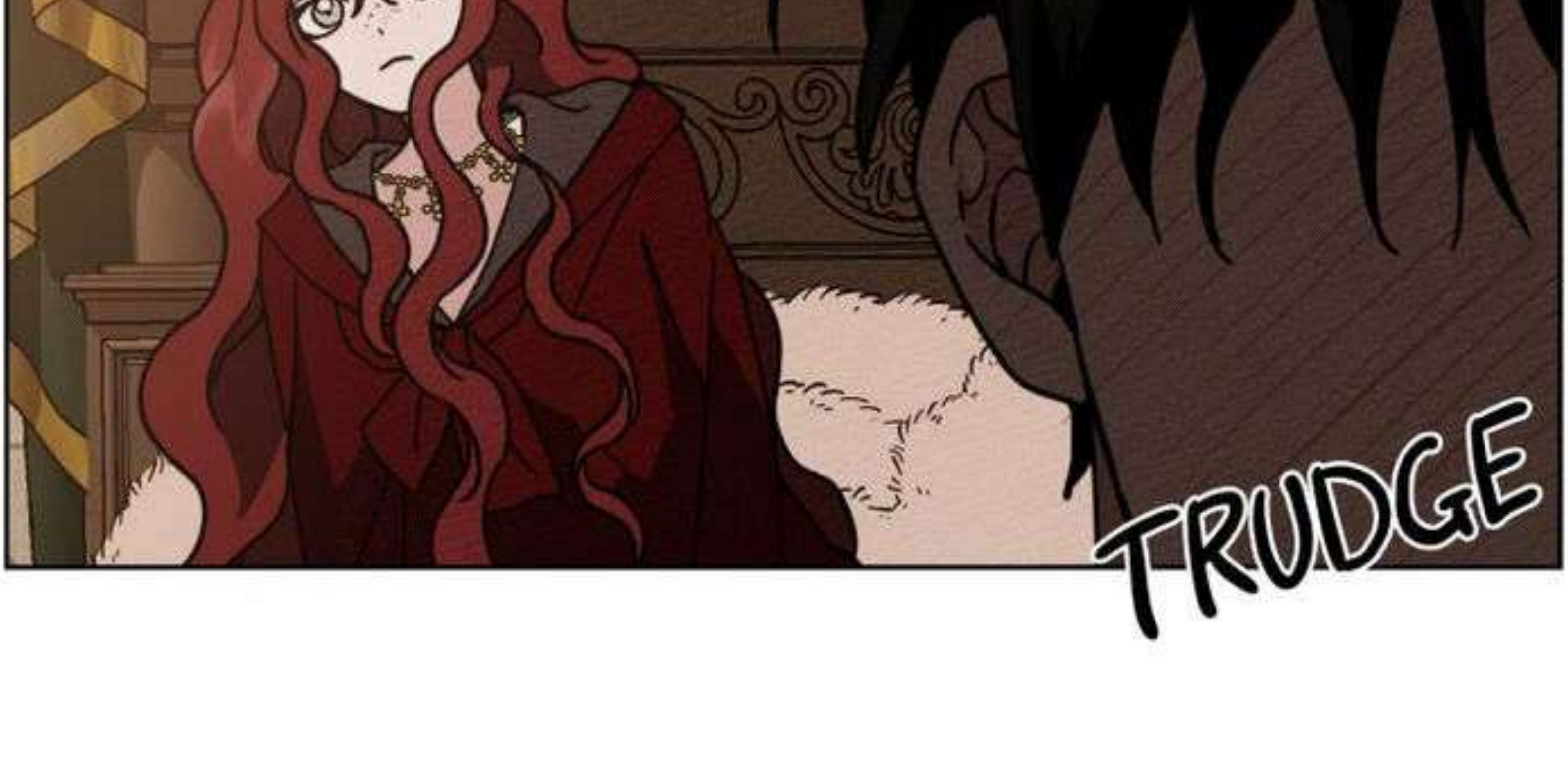

A PLACE FOR ME TO STAY...


MY HOME...!


I'LL D-DO MY B-BEST
? ? ?
... TO M-MAKE IT COZY.
WONDERFUL.

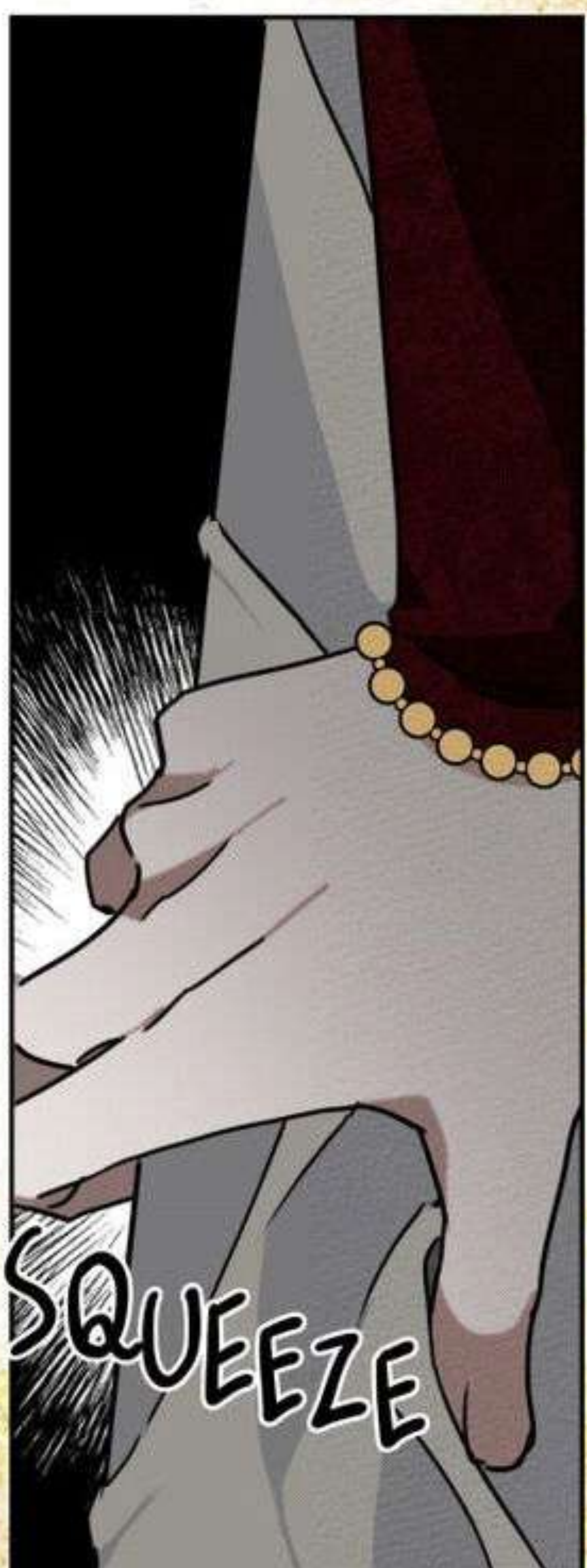

REEK
!!
SNIFF
REEK

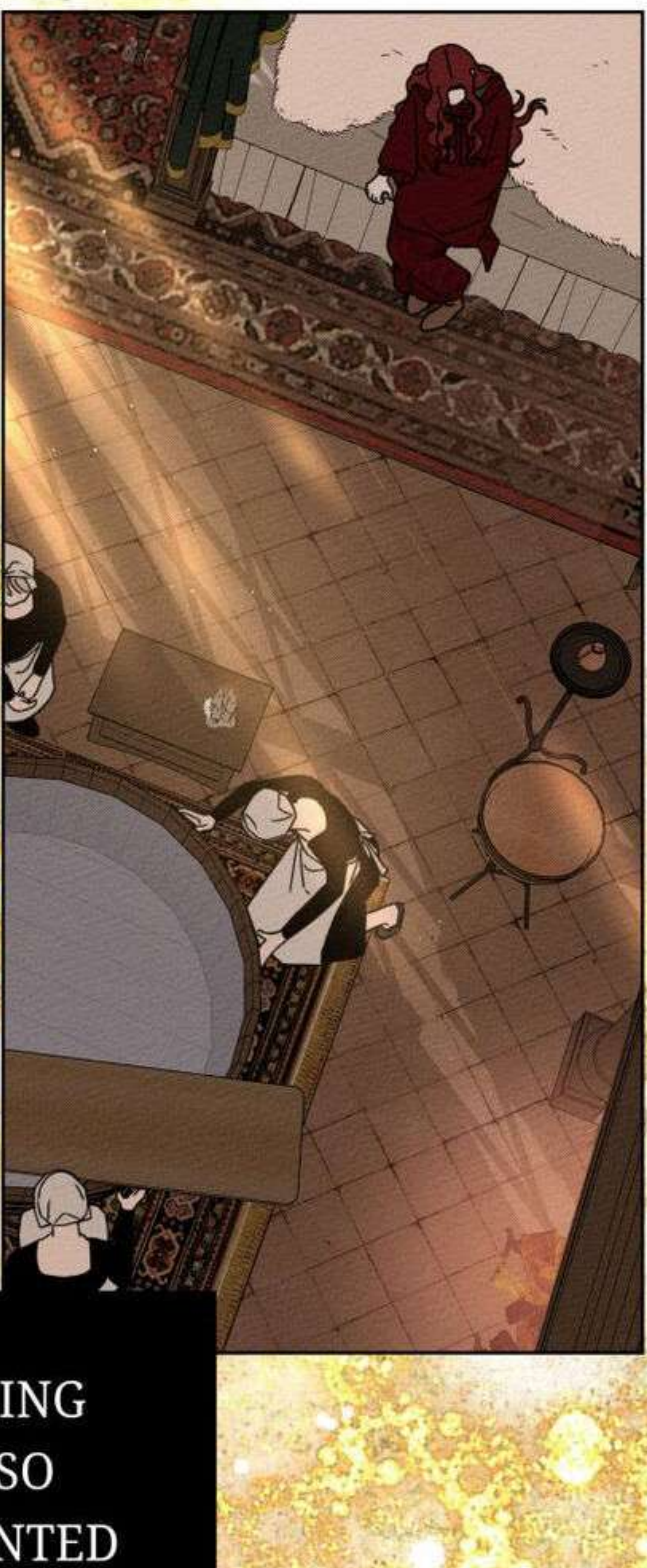

I WOULD L-LIKE TO TAKE A B-BATH...
JOLT!
I'LL TELL THE MAIDS TO PREPARE YOU ONE RIGHT AWAY.


TRUDGE
TRUDGE

RIFTAN MUST
HAVE ASKED ME
TO MANAGE THE
CASTLE BECAUSE
HE THINKS
I'M A WELL-EDUCATED
NOBLEWOMAN.

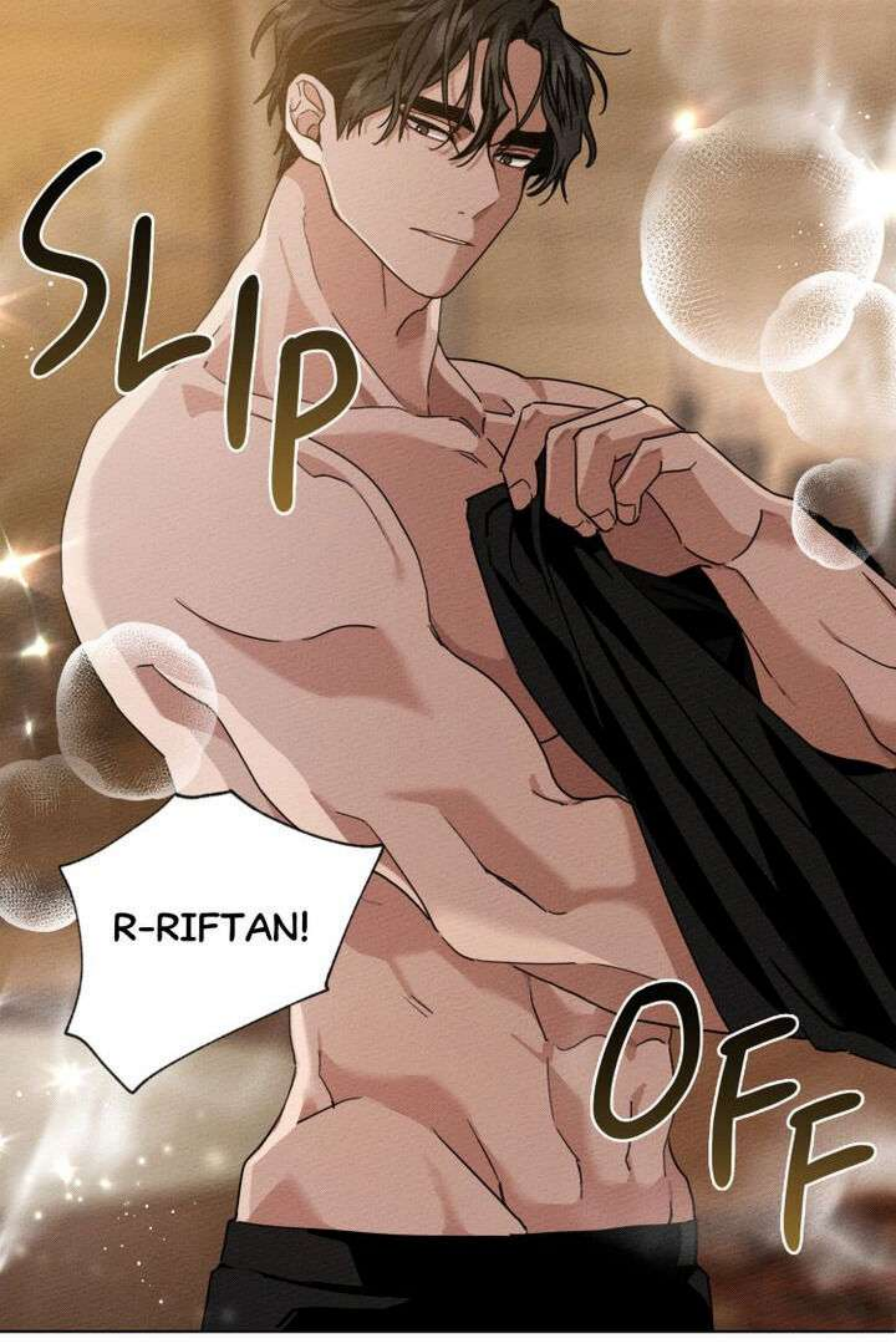
BUT
I'VE NEVER SPENT
SUCH A LARGE
AMOUNT OF MONEY
IN MY LIFE, AND
I DON'T EVEN KNOW
HOW TO ORDER THE
SERVANTS AROUND.





HE'S GOING
TO BE SO
DISAPPOINTED
IF HE FINDS
OUT HE BATTLED
3 LONG YEARS FOR

A USELESS WIFE.
HE MIGHT EVEN CAST ME AWAY.
NO, I WILL NEVER GO BACK TO THE CROYSO CASTLE...
I HAVE TO PROVE MYSELF.
THE BATH'S READY.
COME. LET'S GET IN TOGETHER.


SLIP
R-RIFTAN!
OFF

W-WHY T-TOGETHER...?
STAMMER

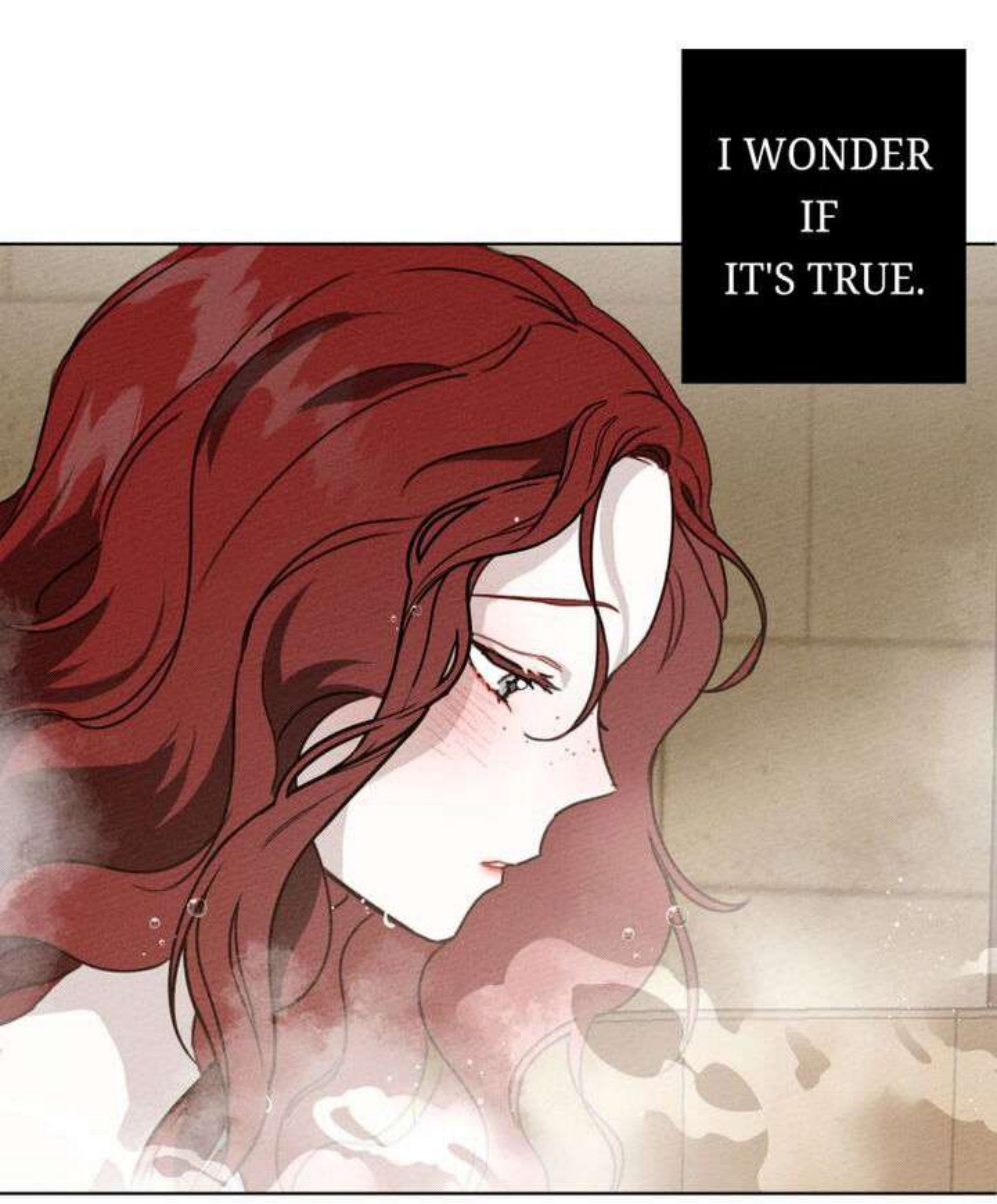
THAT'S WHAT MARRIED COUPLES DO.

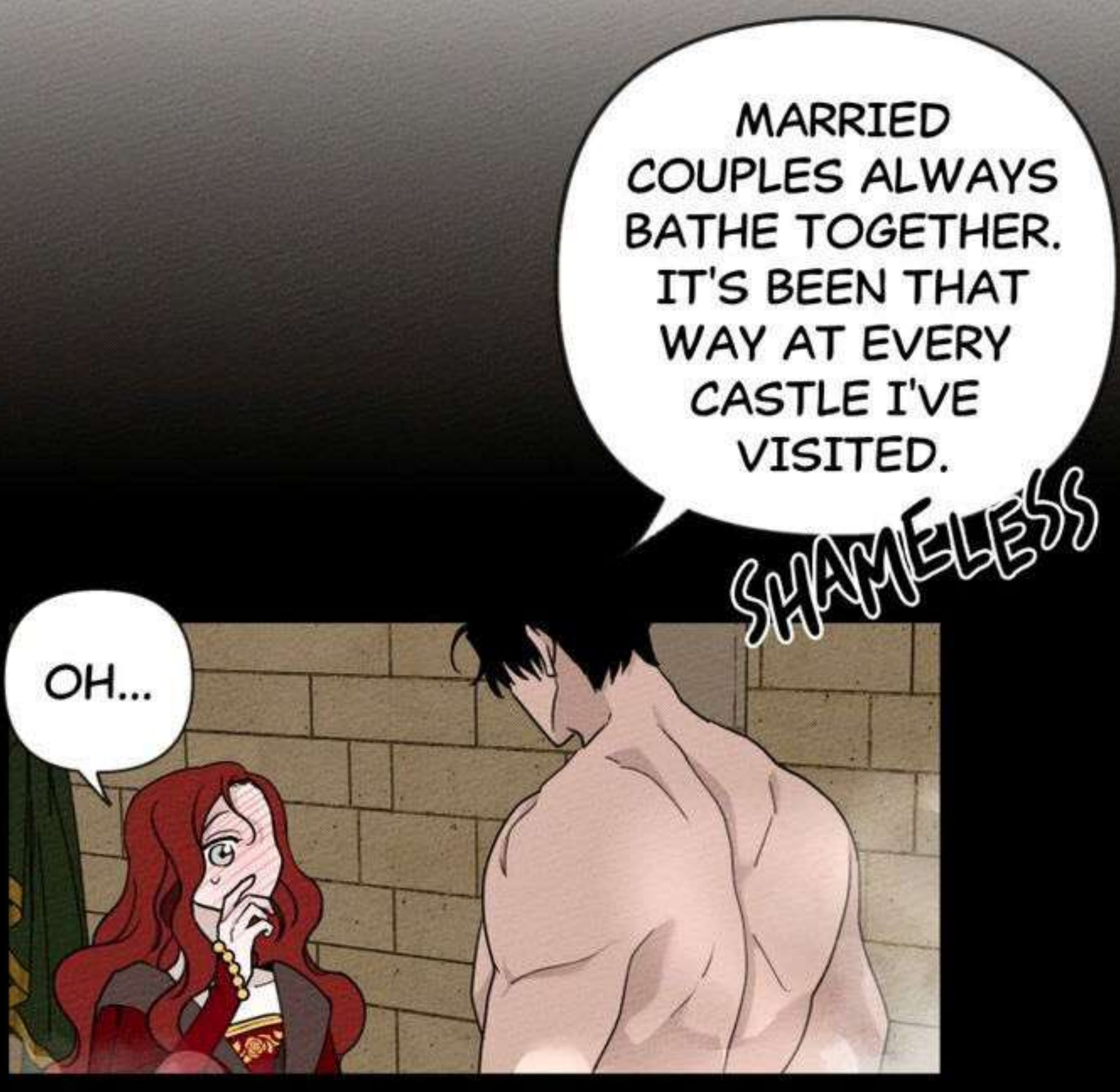
Under the Oak Tree

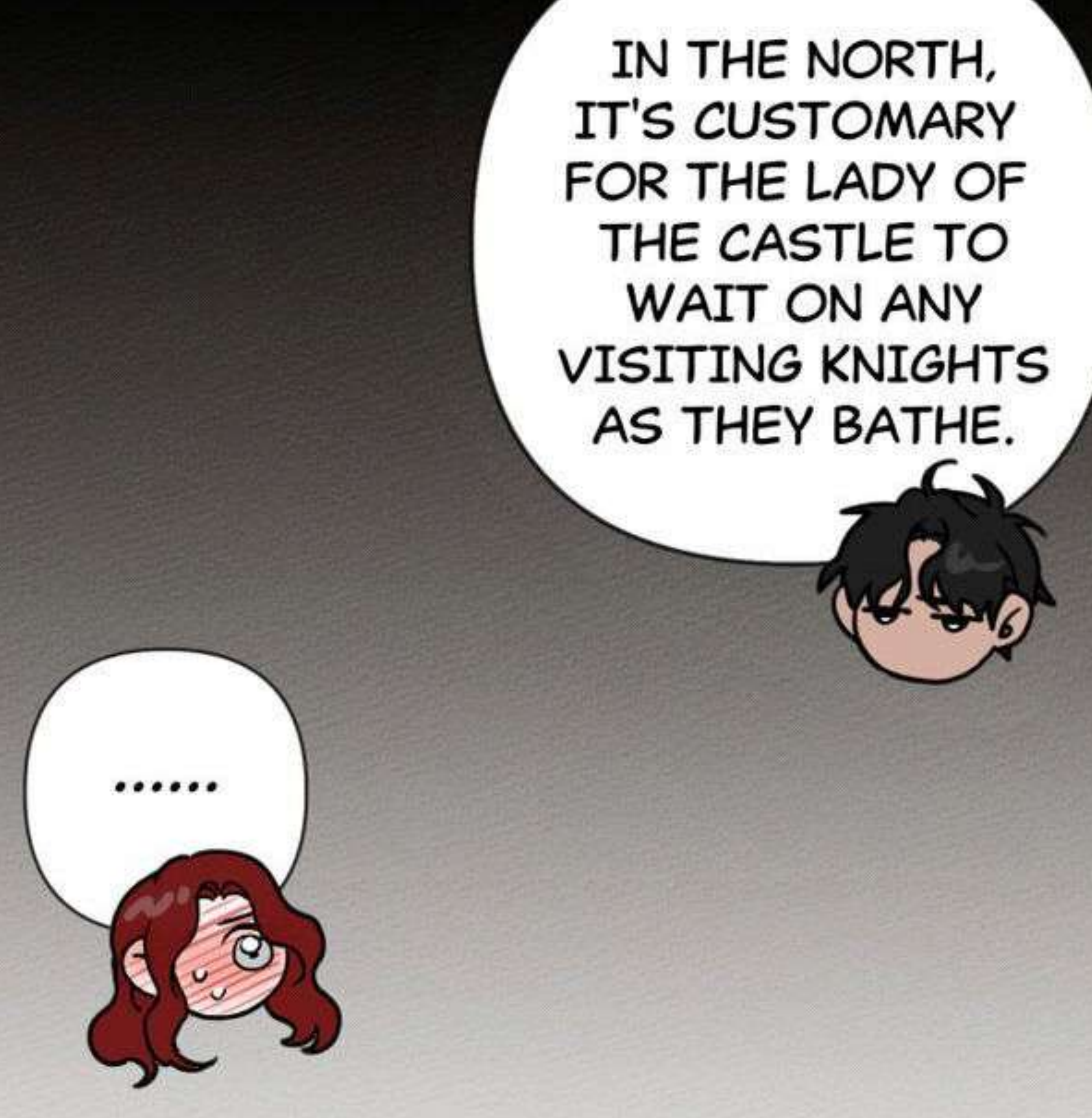
ILLUSTRATION **P** • ADAPTED BY **namu** • WRITER **Kim Suji**

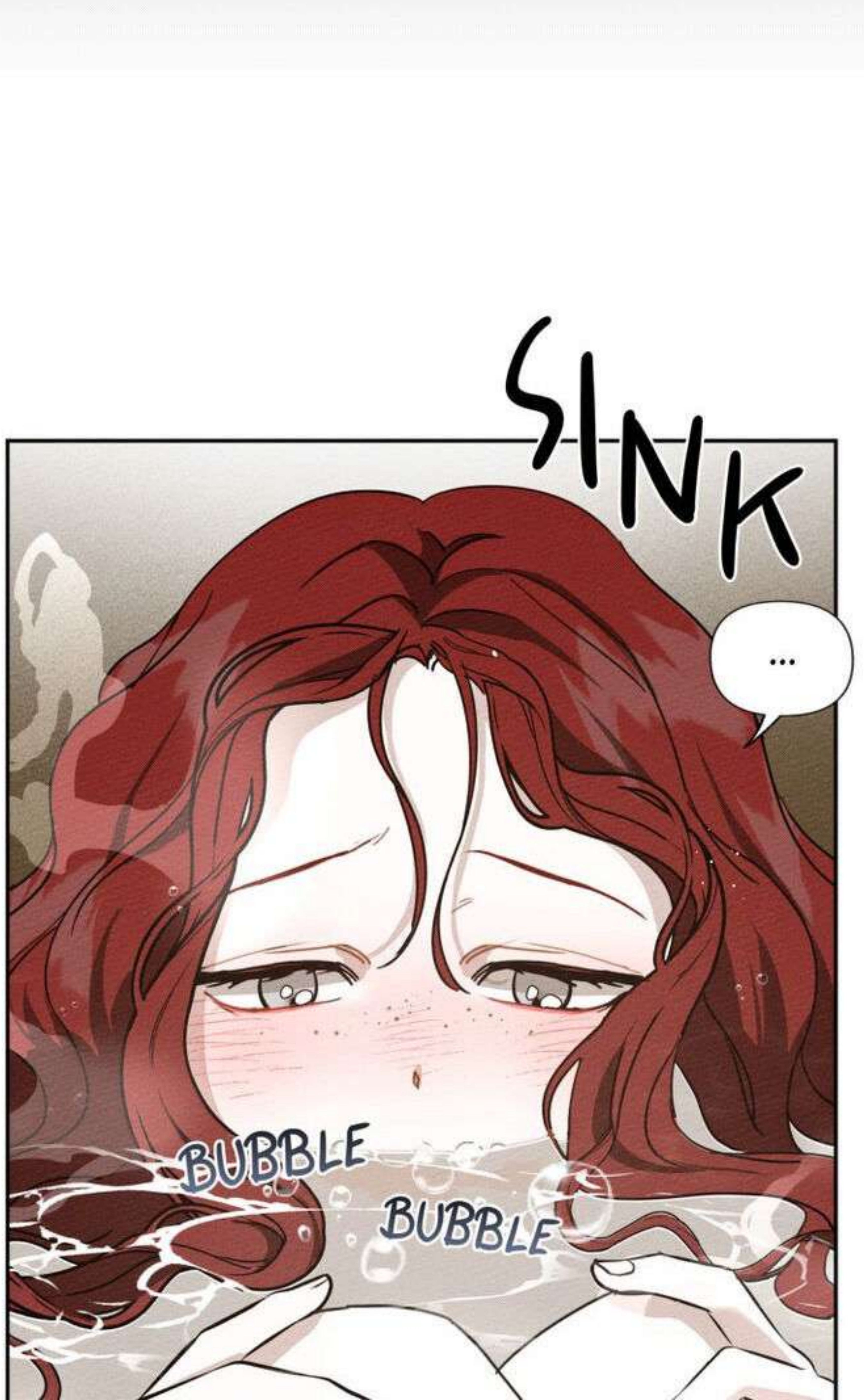
9

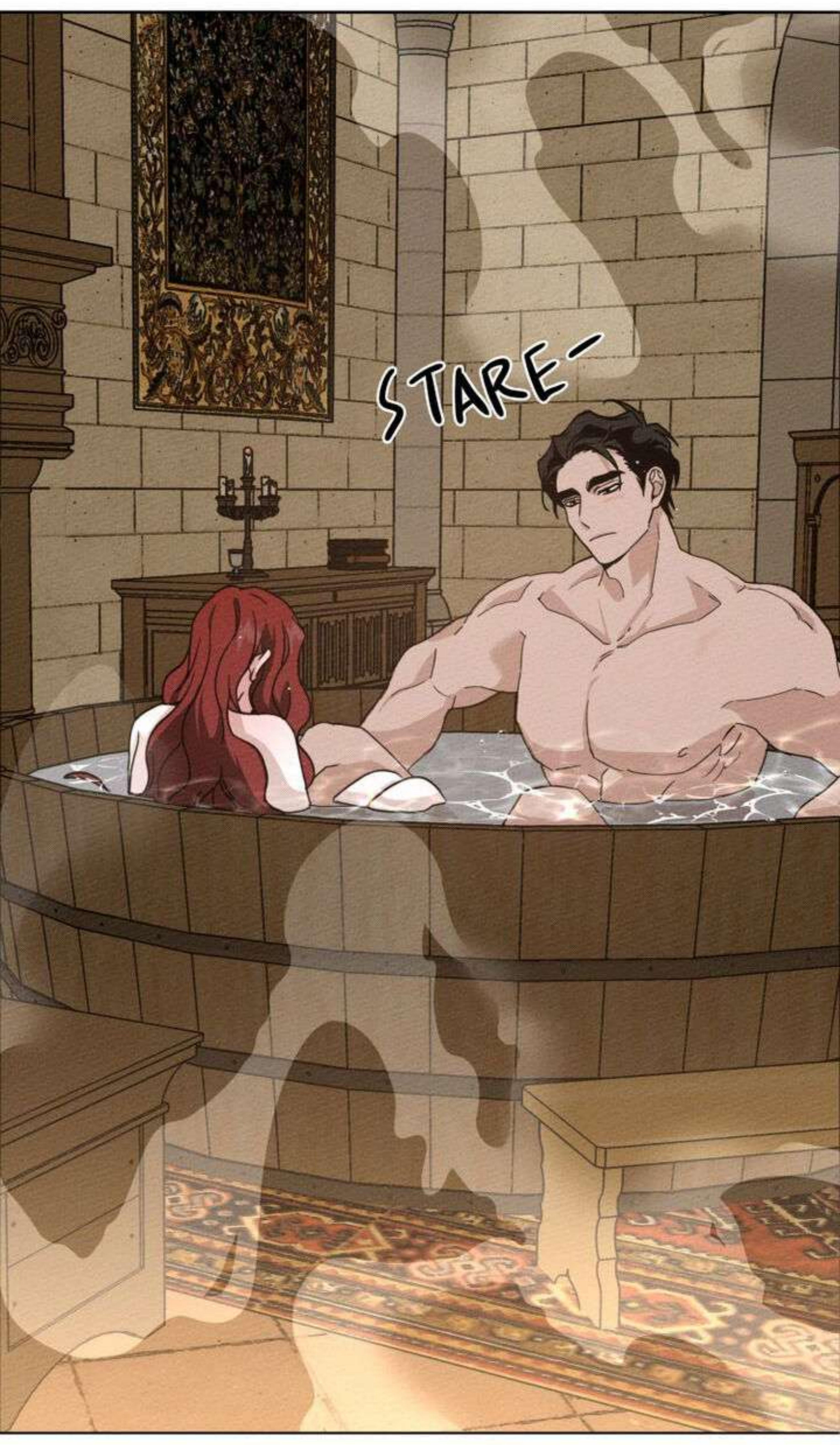
SPLASH..

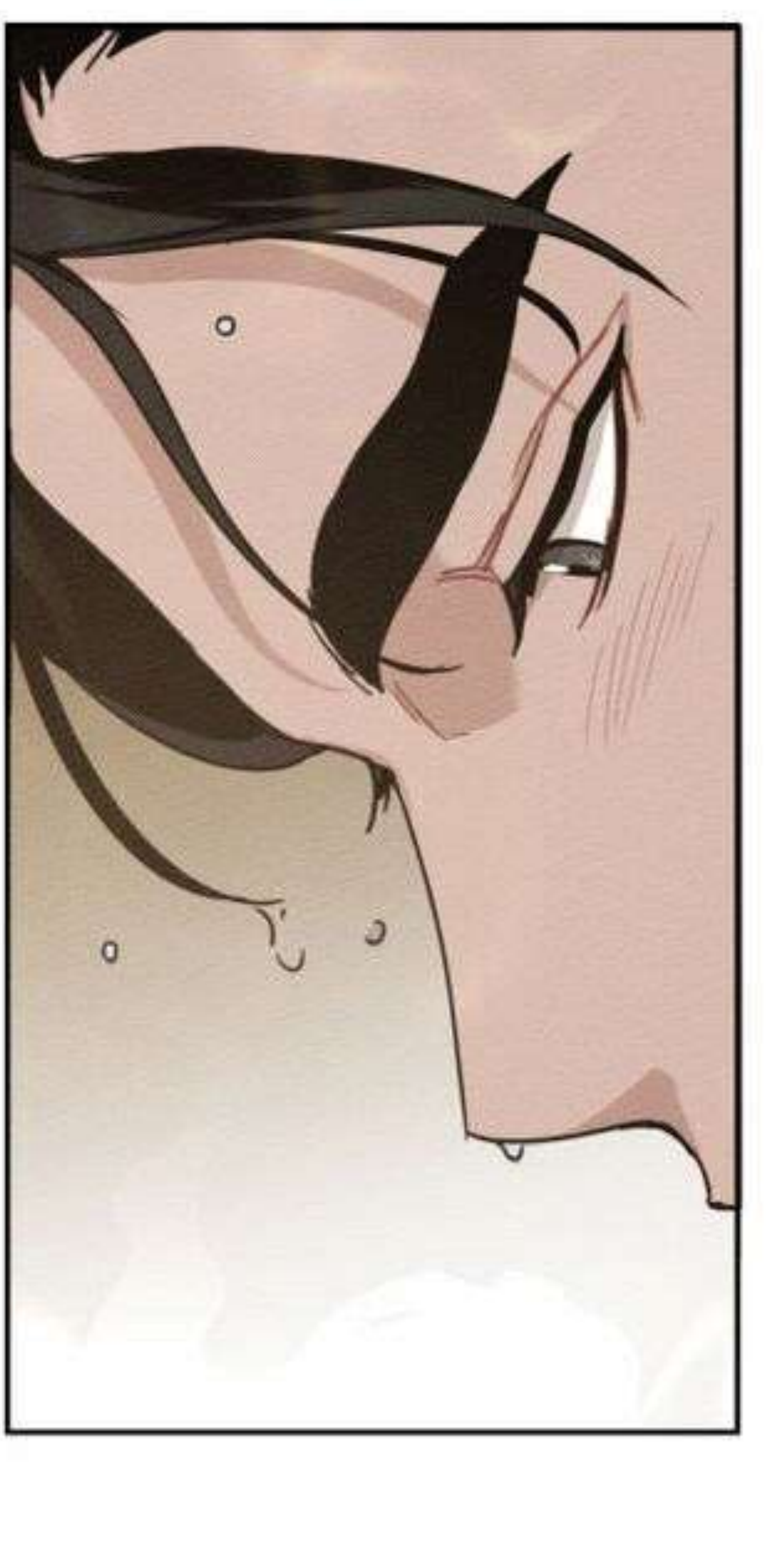

I WONDER IF IT'S TRUE.

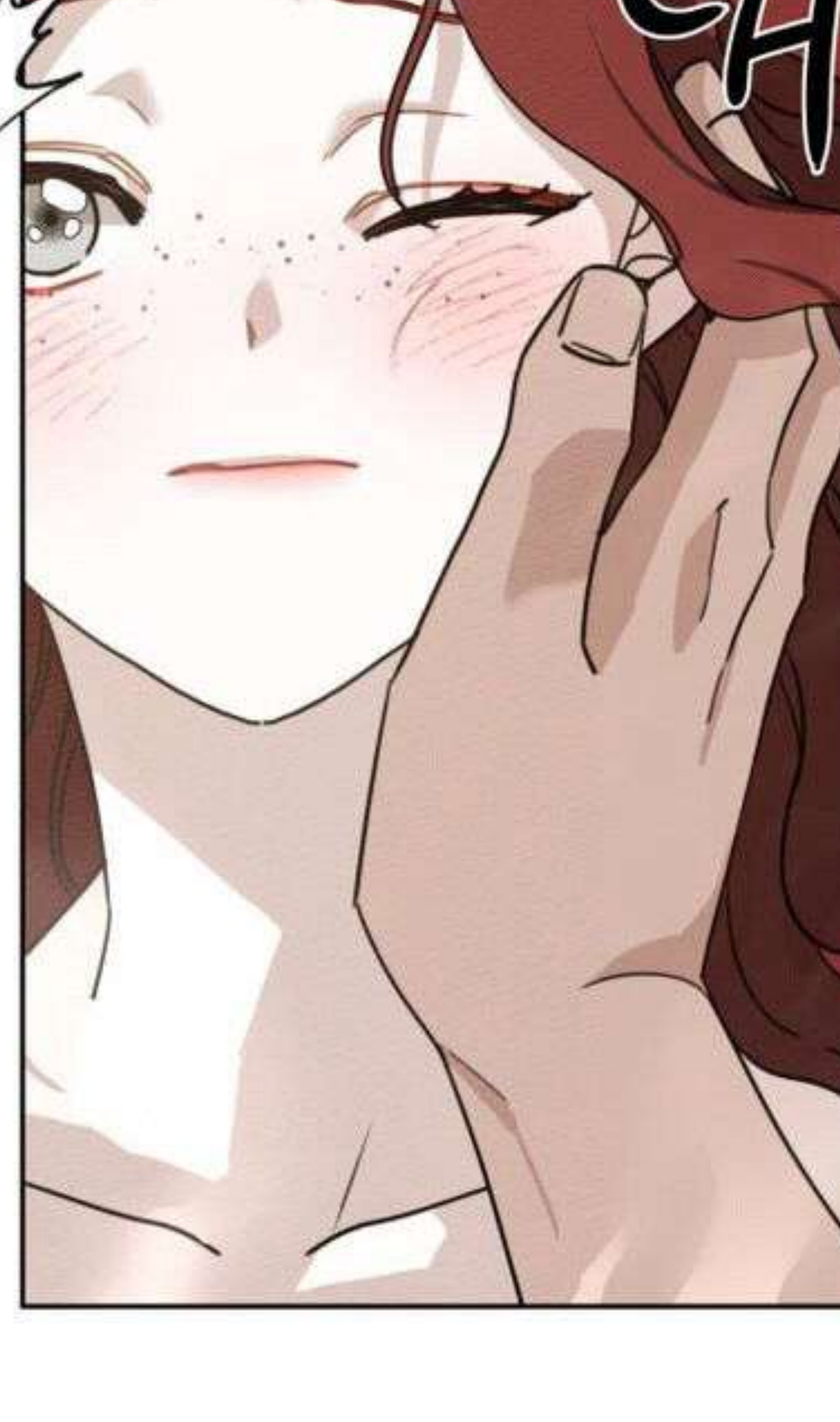

MARRIED COUPLES ALWAYS BATHE TOGETHER. IT'S BEEN THAT WAY AT EVERY CASTLE I'VE VISITED.
SHAMELESS
OH...

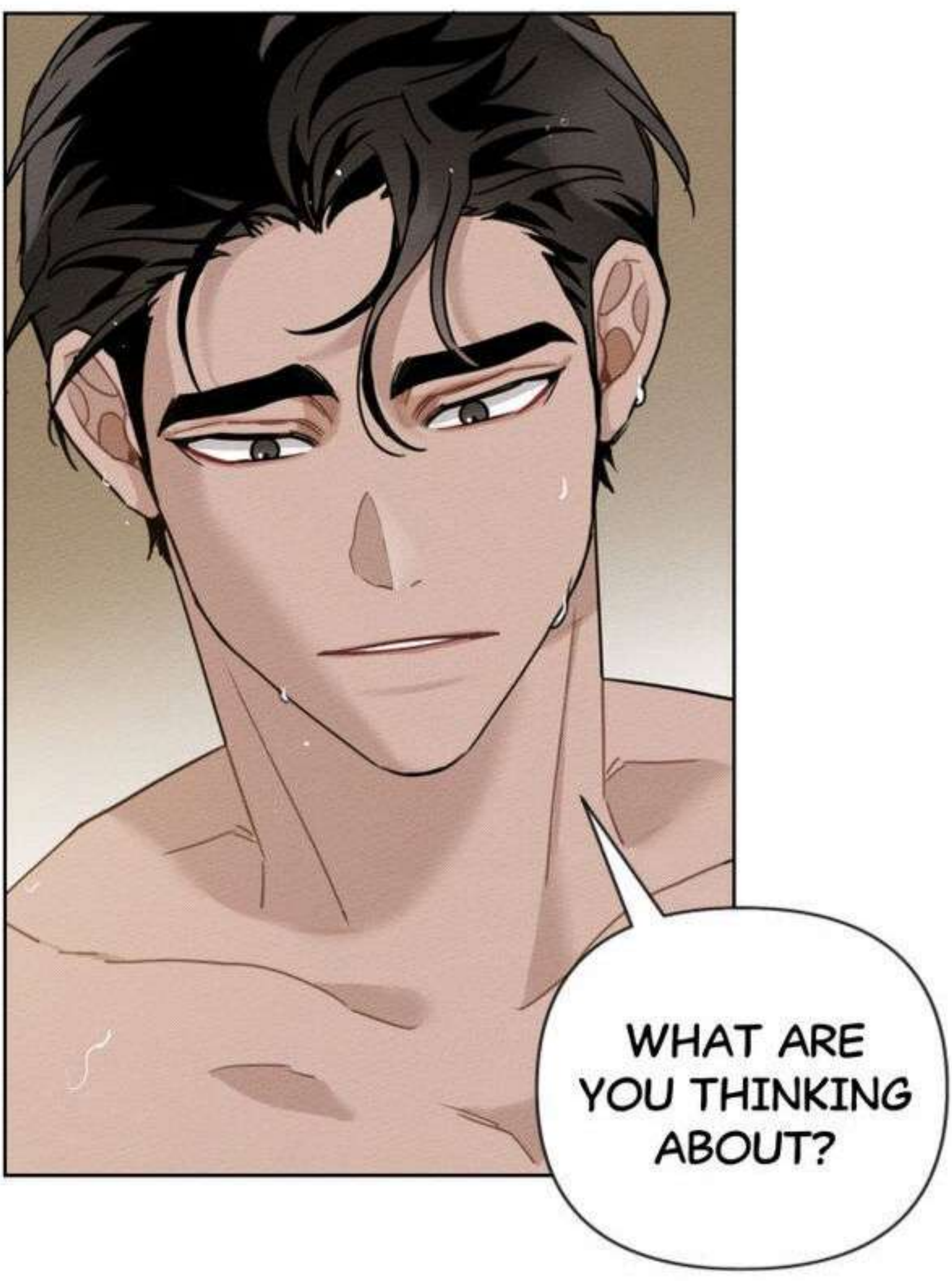

IN THE NORTH, IT'S CUSTOMARY FOR THE LADY OF THE CASTLE TO WAIT ON ANY VISITING KNIGHTS AS THEY BATHE.
......

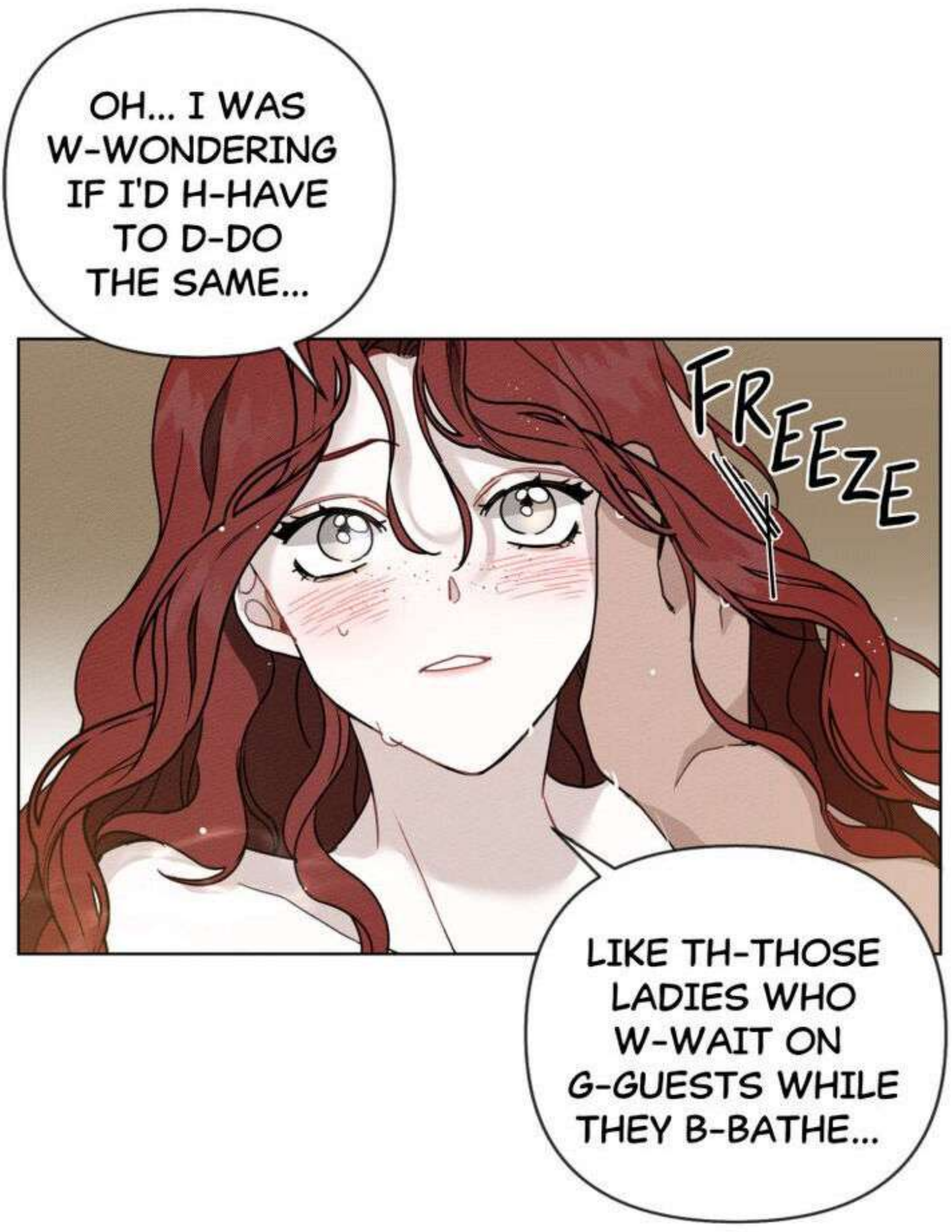

SINK
...
BUBBLE
BUBBLE

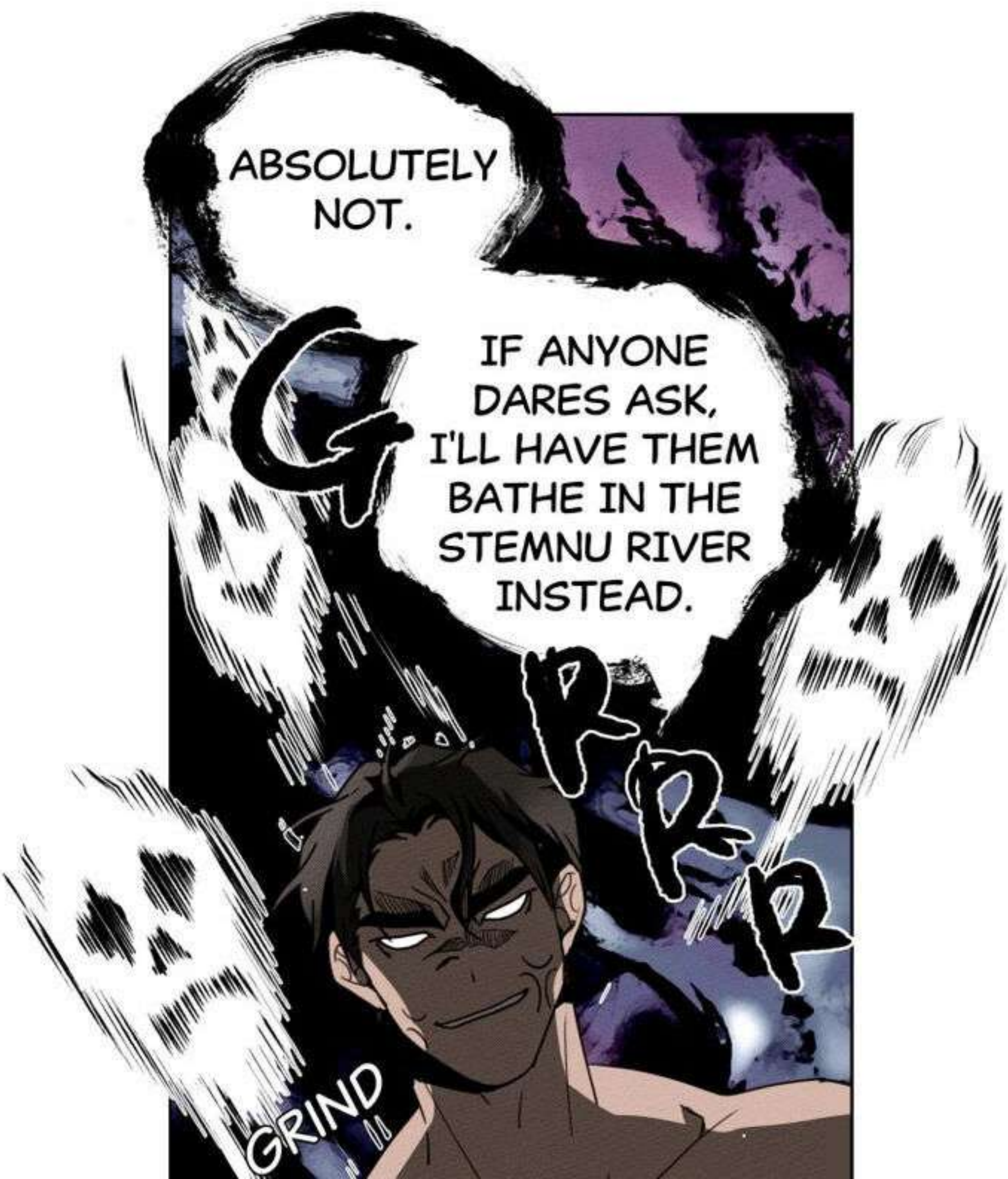

STARE-



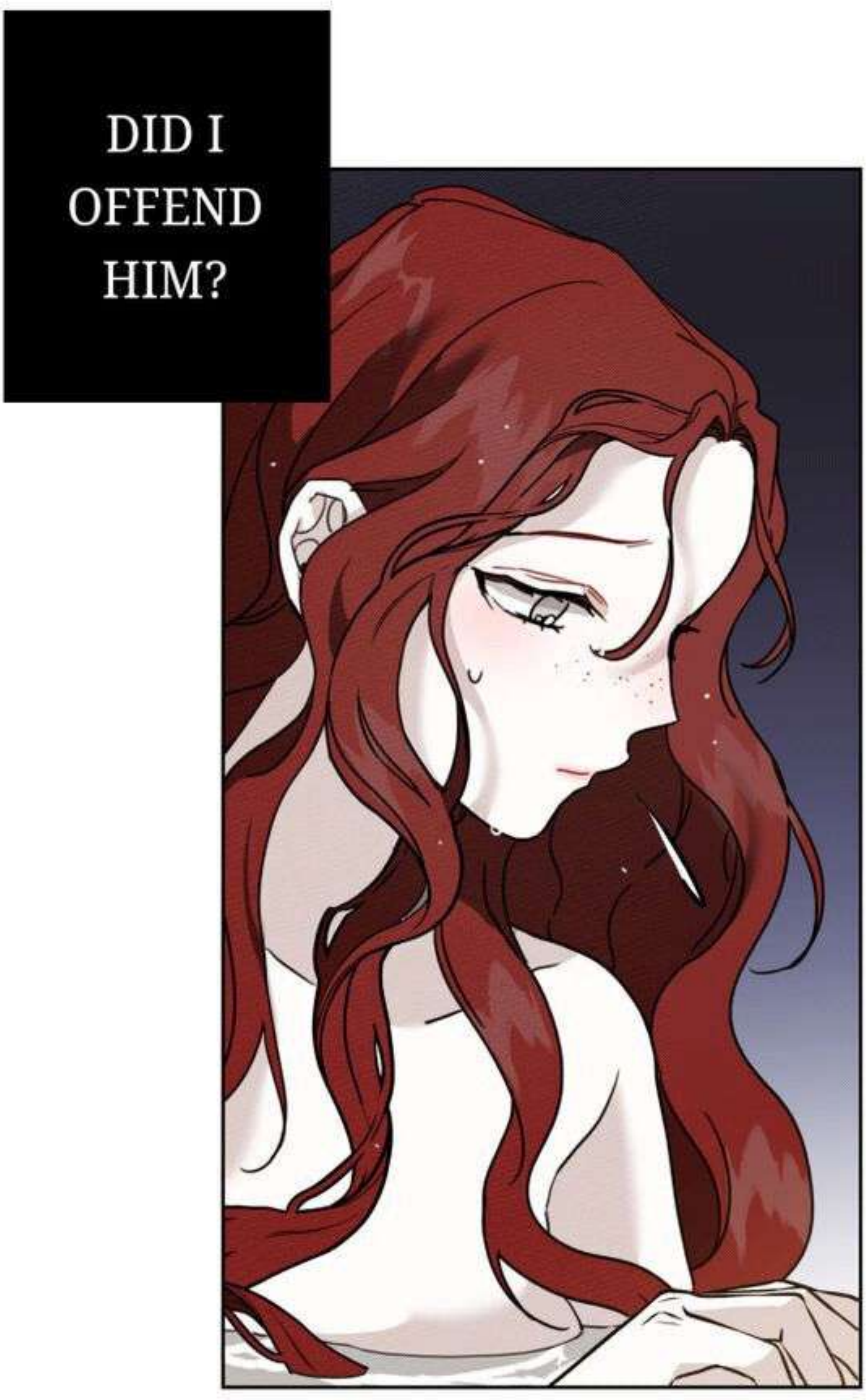

TOUCH

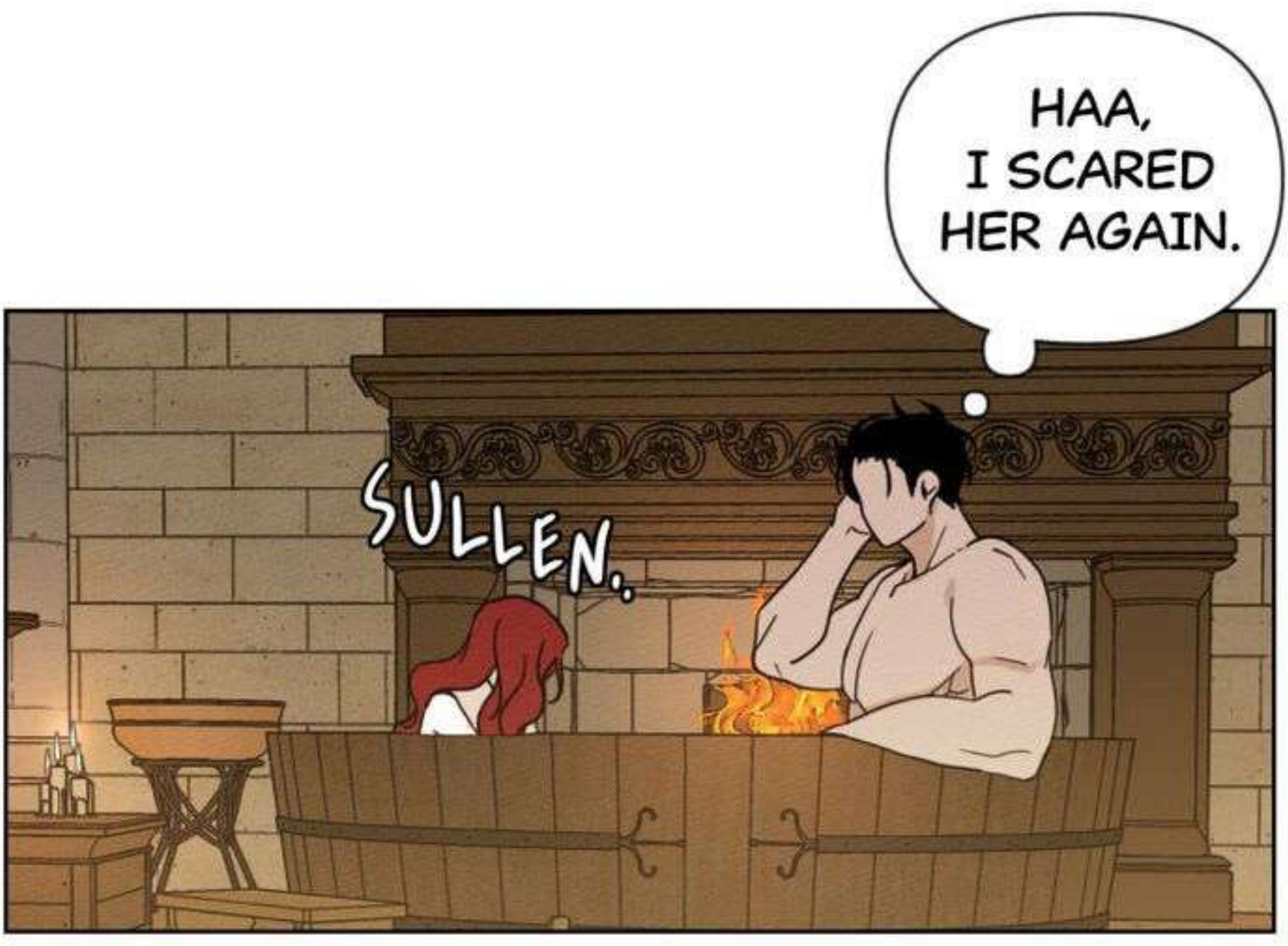

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?

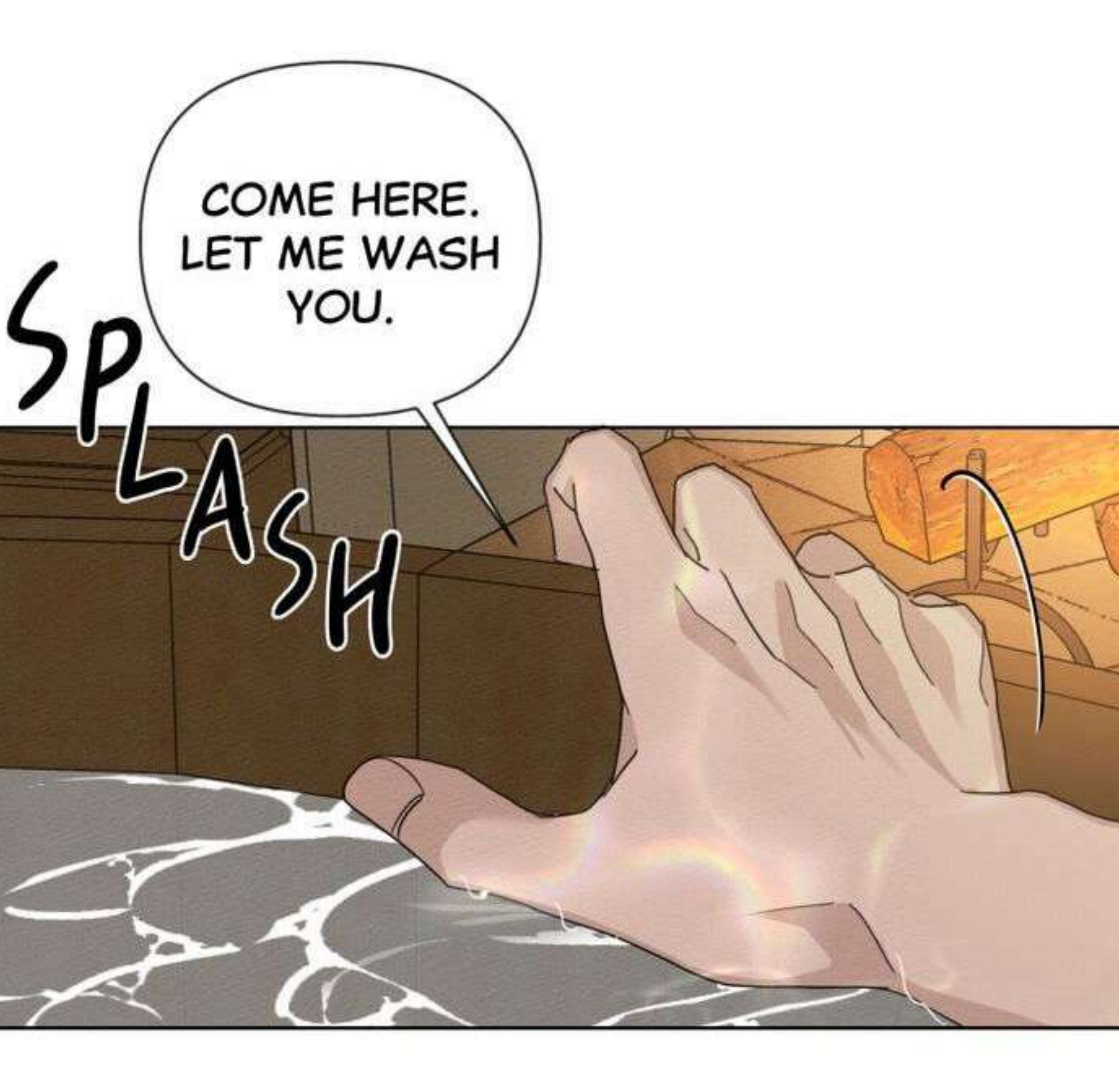

OH... I WAS W-WONDERING IF I'D H-HAVE TO D-DO THE SAME...
FREEZE
LIKE TH-THOSE LADIES WHO W-WAIT ON G-GUESTS WHILE THEY B-BATHE...

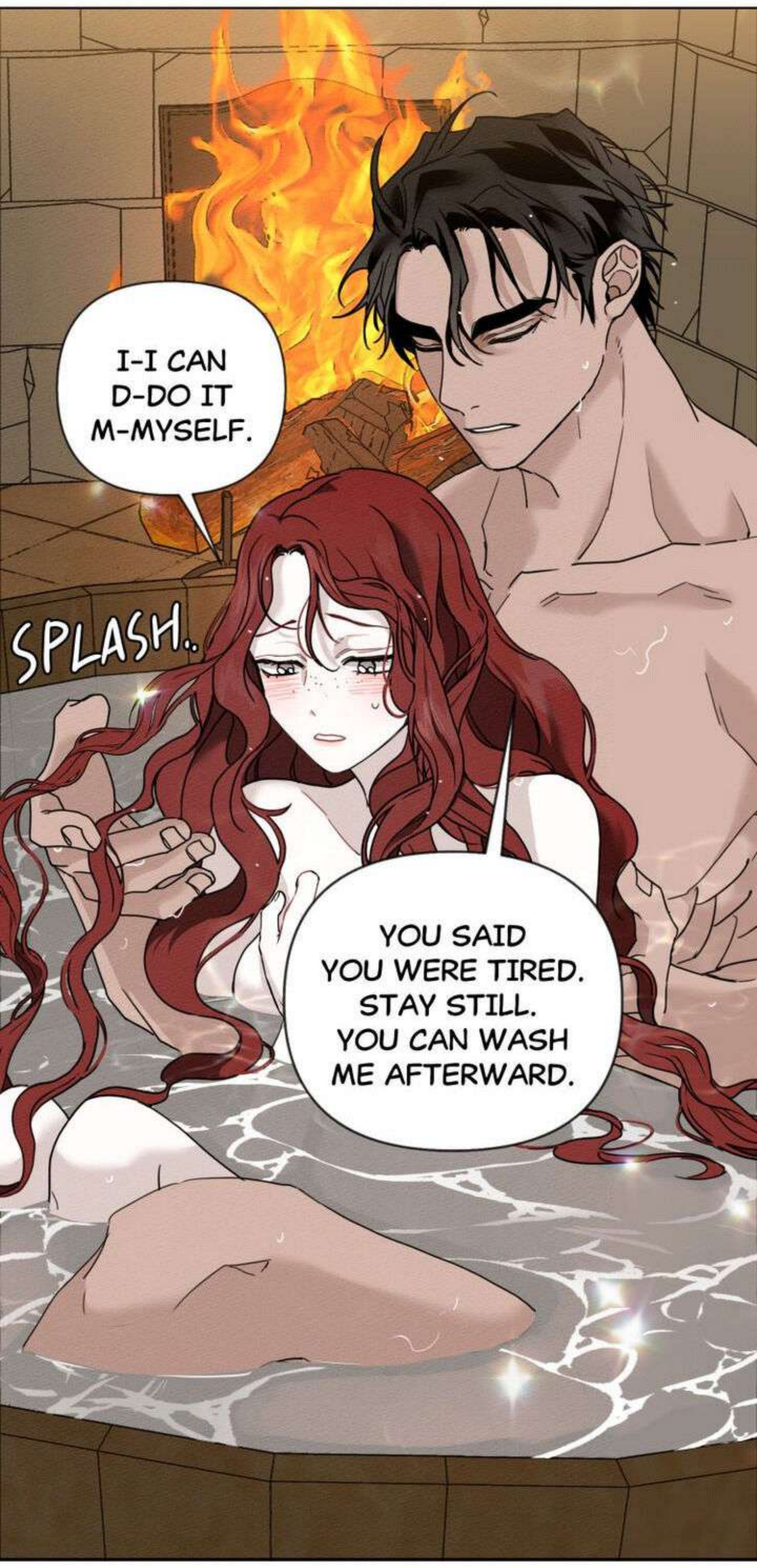

ABSOLUTELY NOT.
IF ANYONE DARES ASK, I'LL HAVE THEM BATHE IN THE STEMNU RIVER INSTEAD.
GRRRR
GRIND

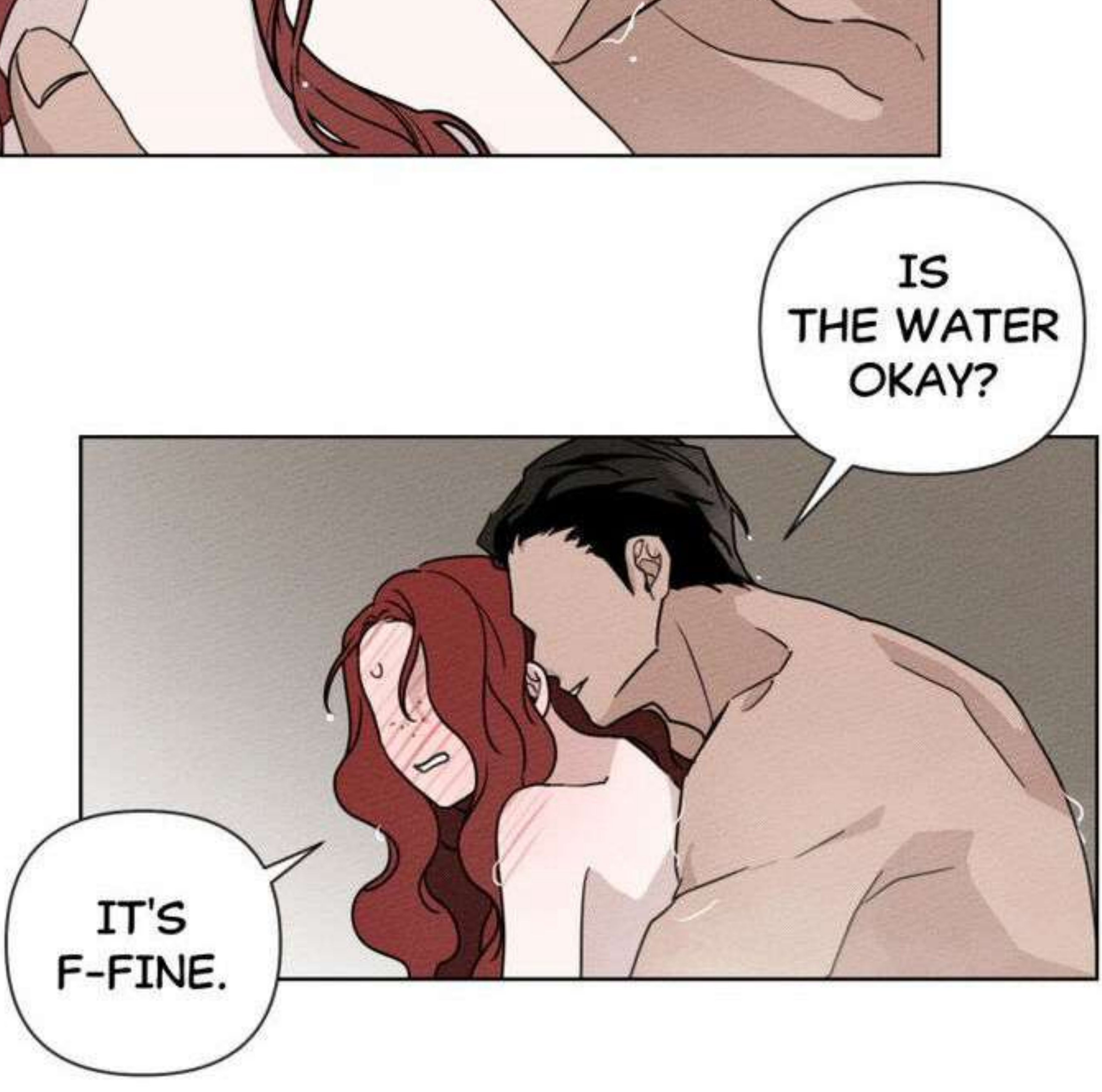
*STEMNU RIVER:
A RIVER THAT IS SAID TO FLOW
IN THE UNDERWORLD


DID I OFFEND HIM?

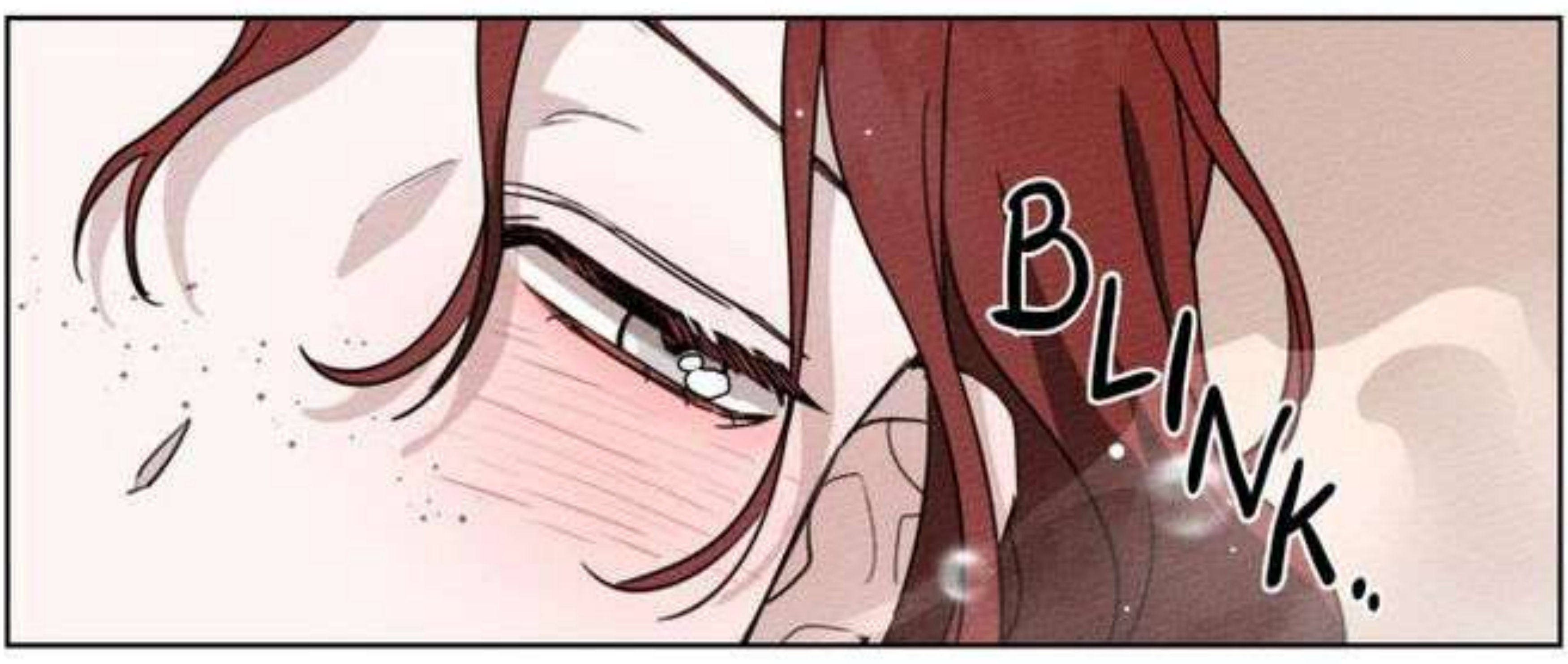

HAA, I SCARED HER AGAIN.
SULLEN.


COME HERE. LET ME WASH YOU.
SPLASH


I-I CAN D-DO IT M-MYSELF.
SPLASH..
YOU SAID YOU WERE TIRED. STAY STILL. YOU CAN WASH ME AFTERWARD.


IS THE WATER OKAY?
IT'S F-FINE.

HOW STRANGE.

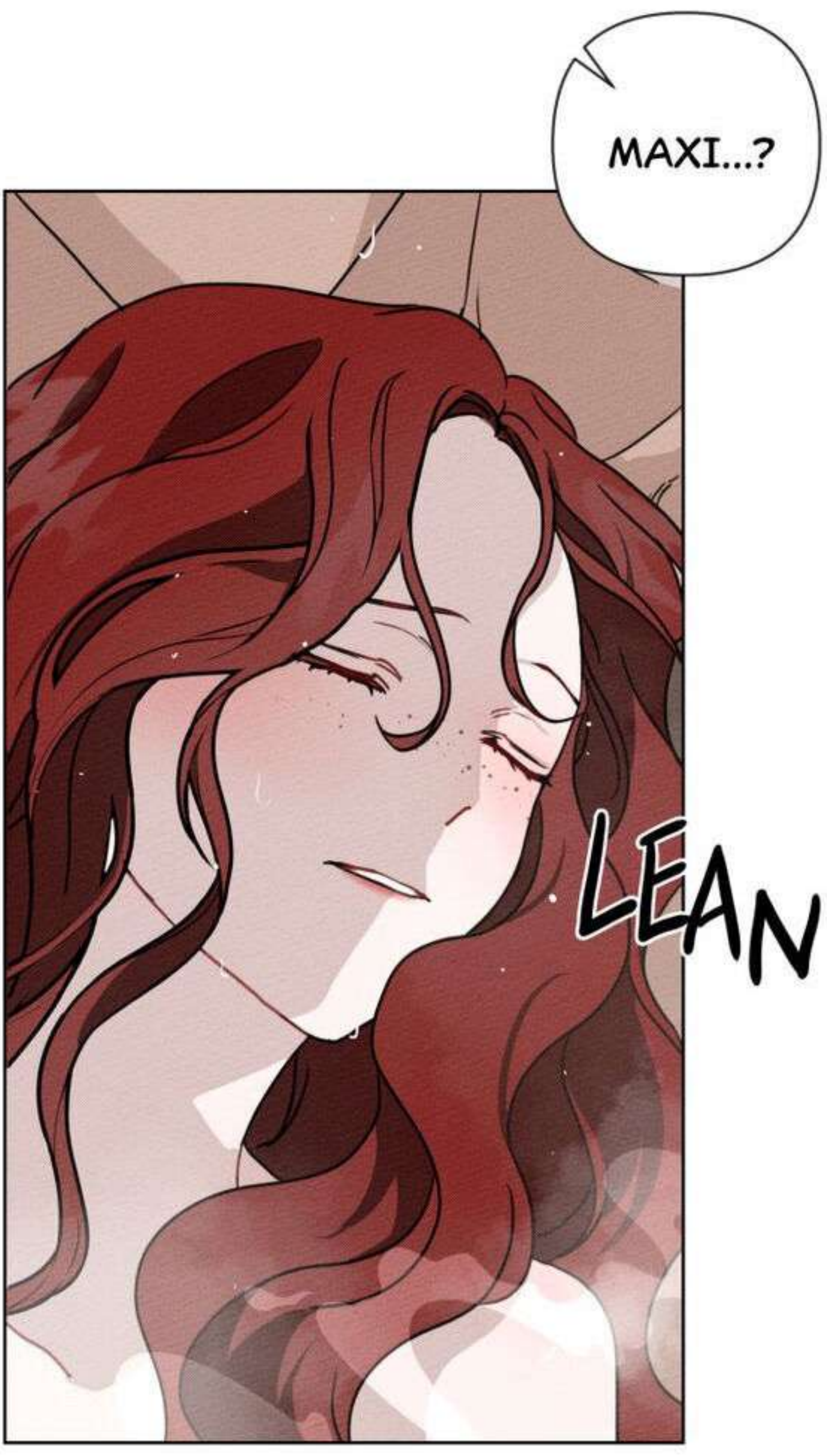


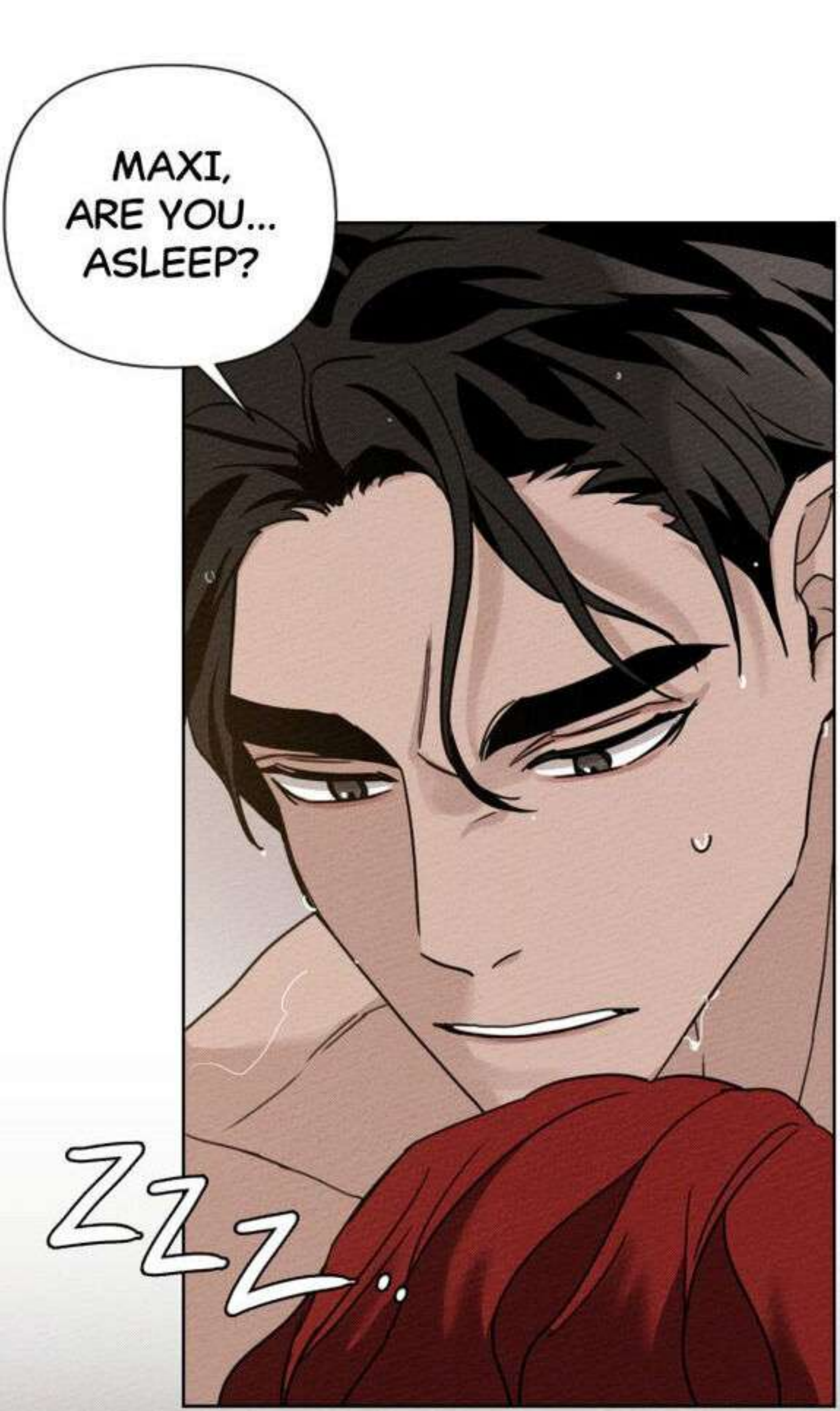
NOW THAT I CAN FINALLY RELAX, I'M STARTING TO FEEL DROWSY.

MAYBE ALL THAT FATIGUE HAS FINALLY CAUGHT UP TO ME.

SPLOSH
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE IT'S SO... WARM.
HIS TOUCH..

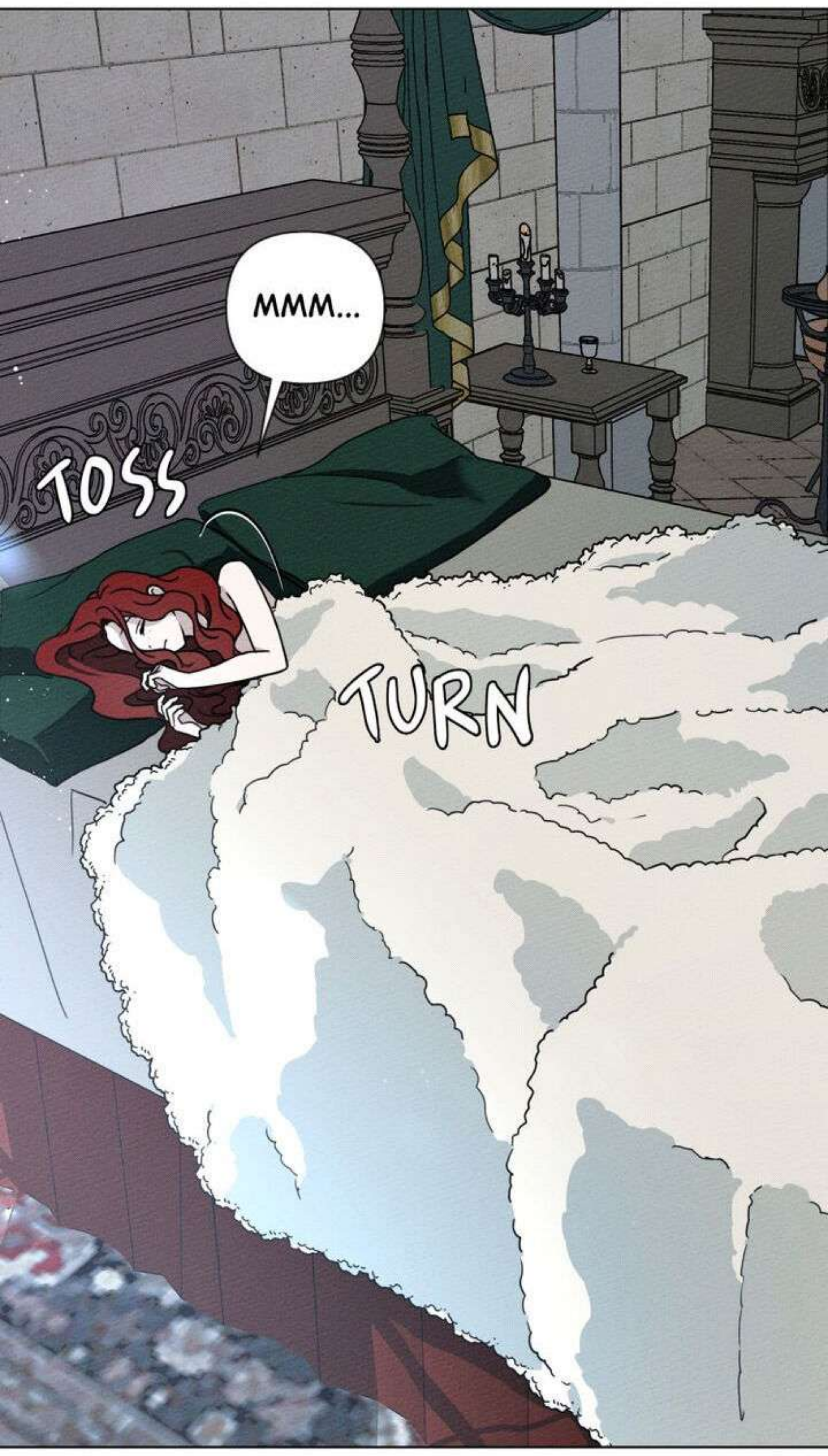
FEELS GOOD...

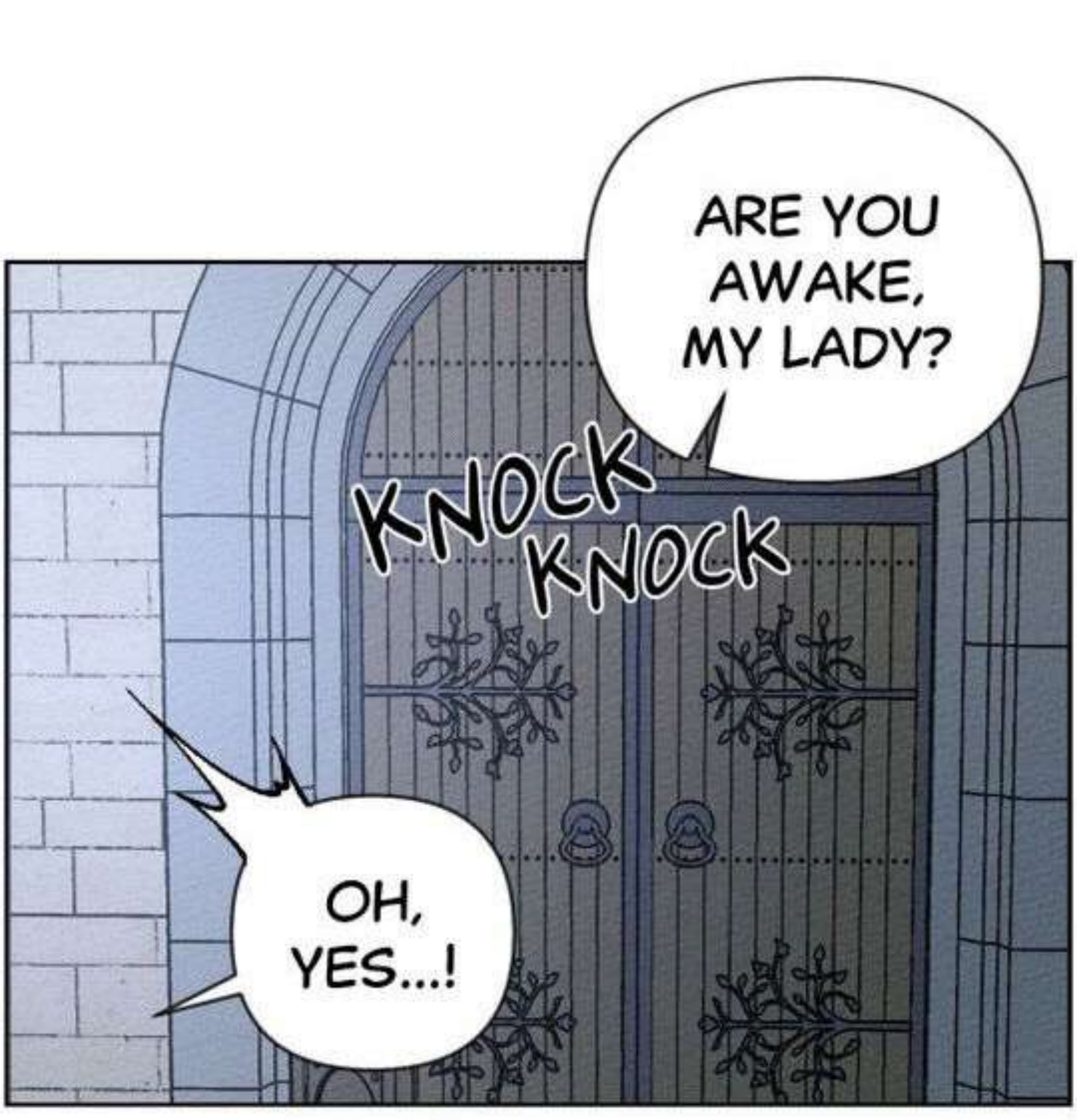


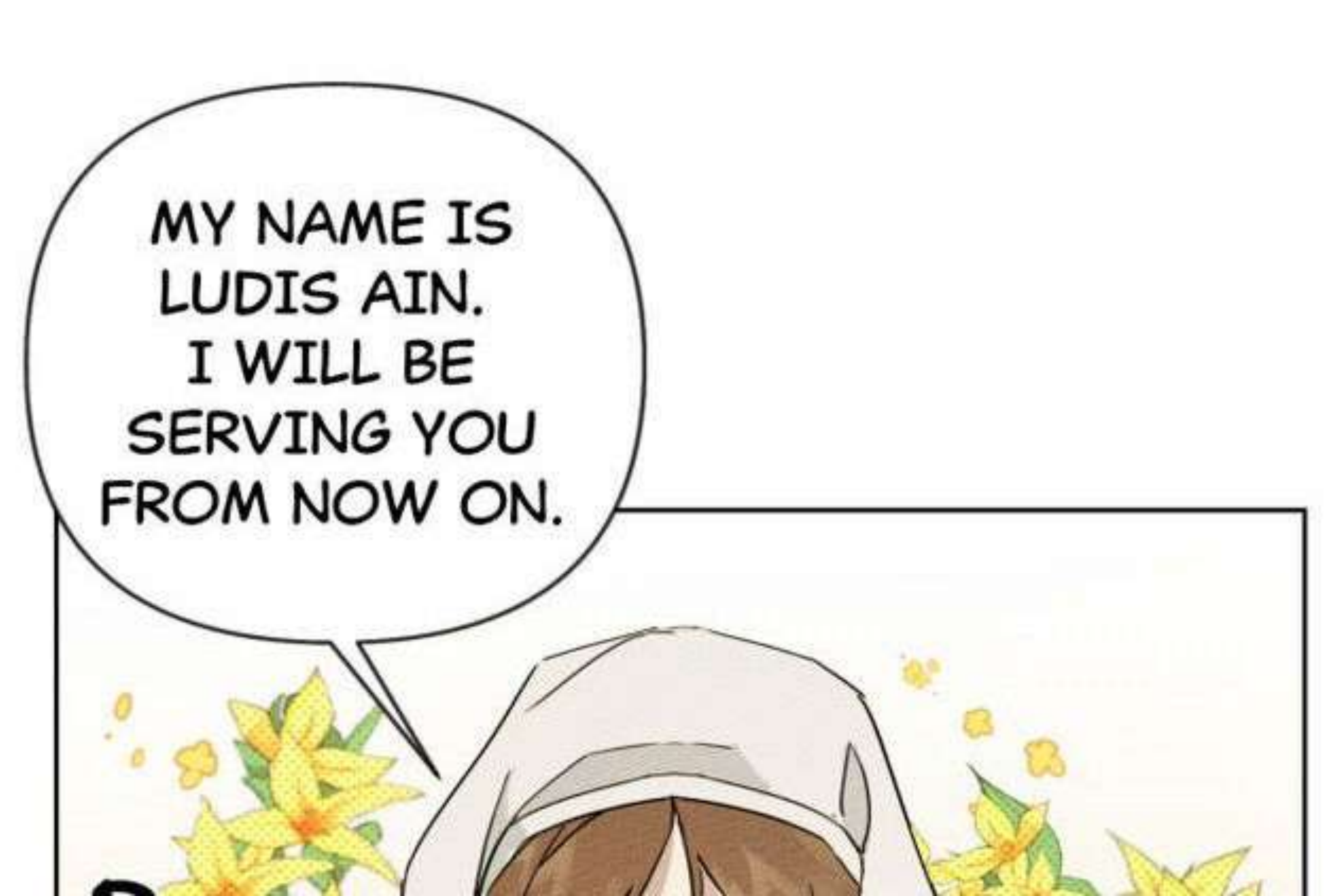

MAXI, ARE YOU... ASLEEP?
ZZZ..

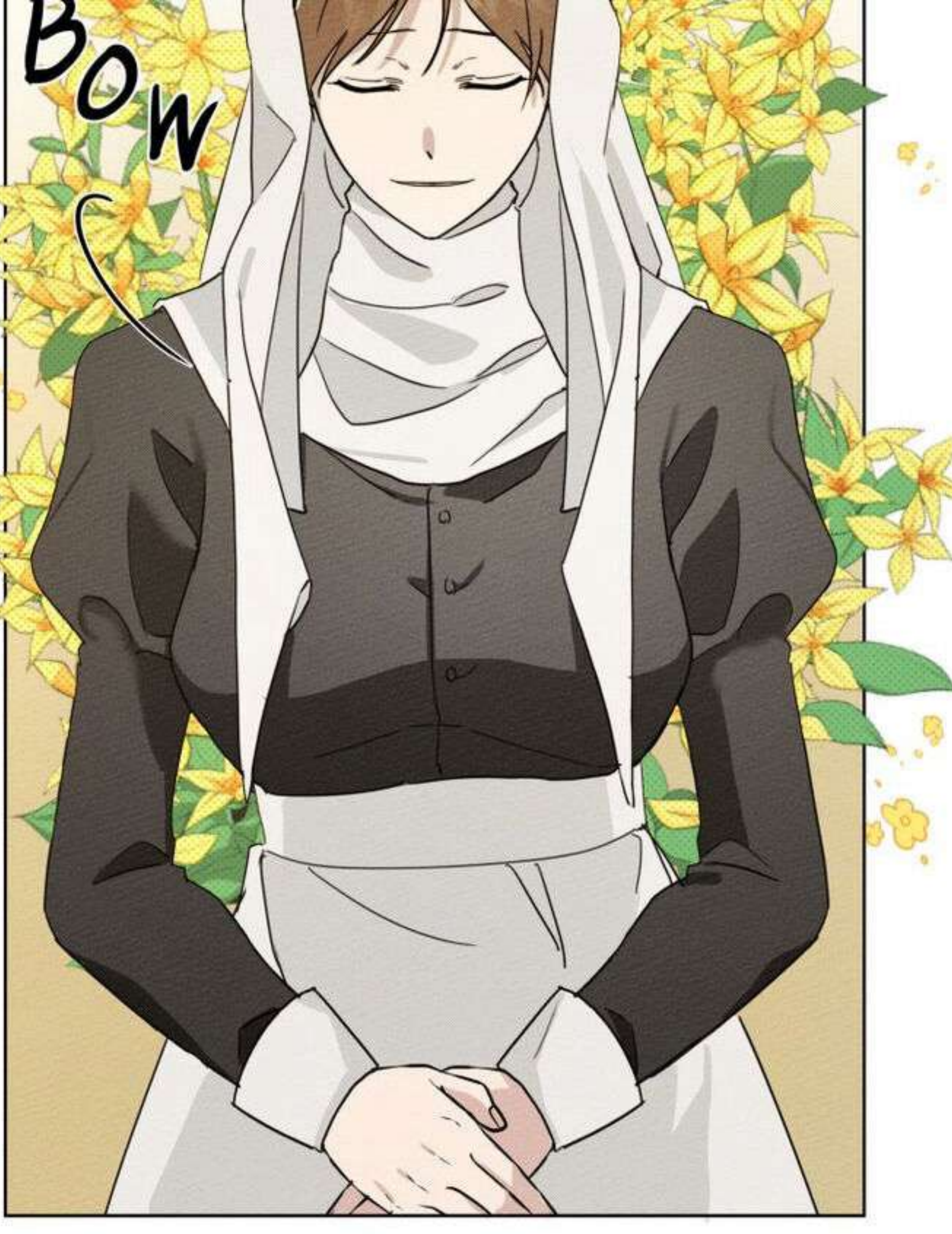
ARE YOU REALLY?

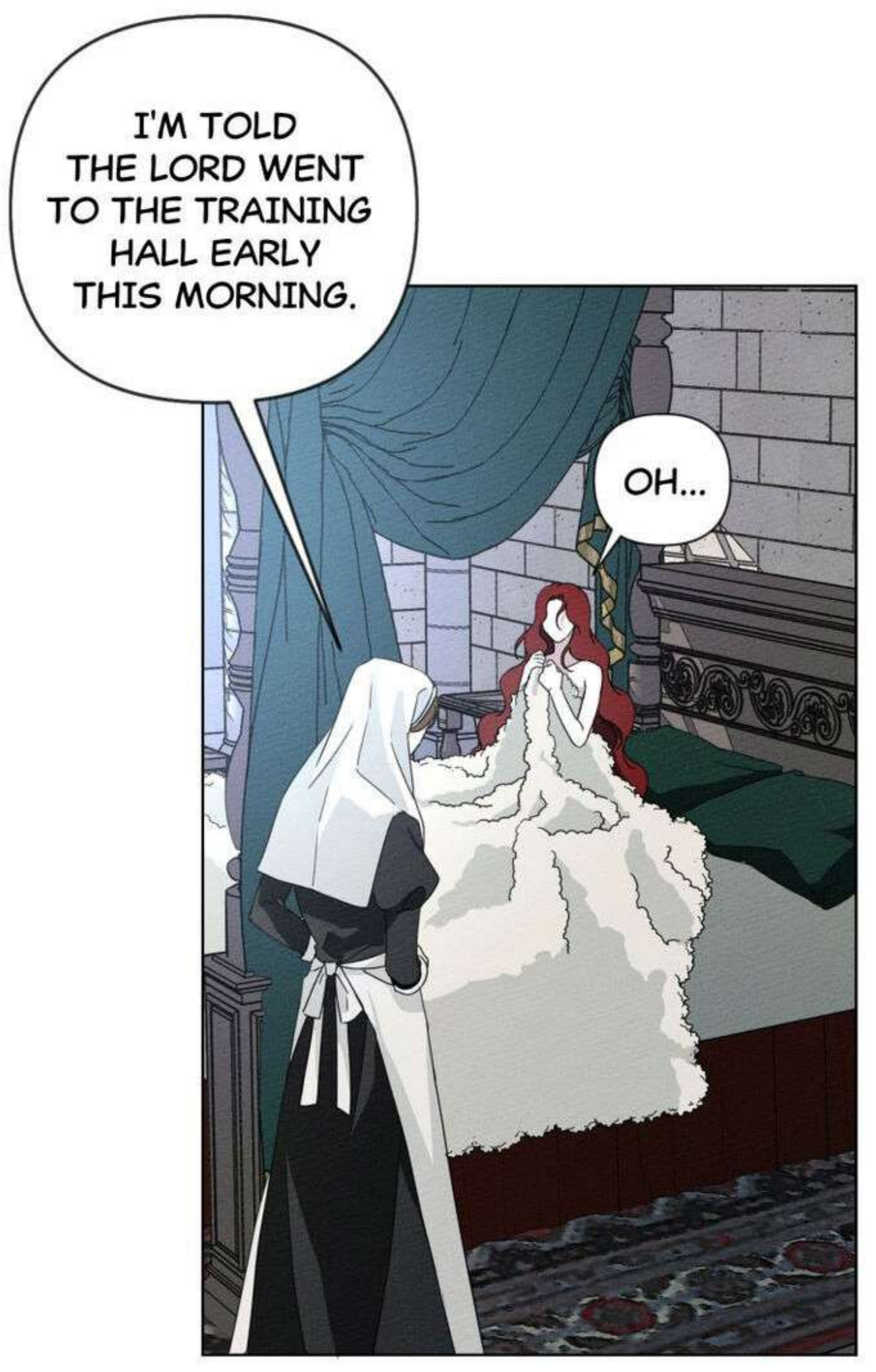
BLINK..


MMM...
TOSS
TURN


ARE YOU AWAKE, MY LADY?
KNOCK KNOCK
OH, YES...!

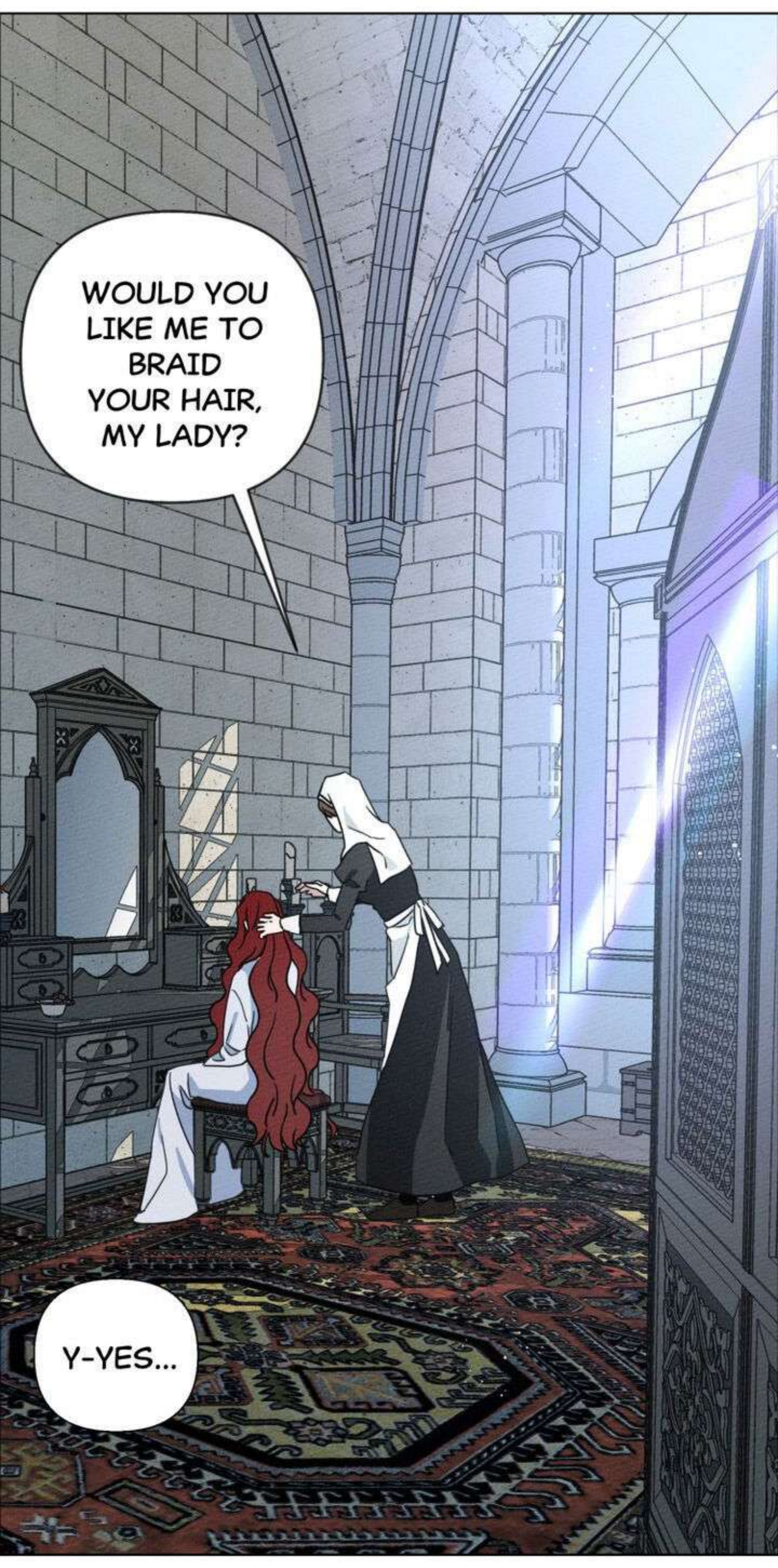

MY NAME IS LUDIS AIN. I WILL BE SERVING YOU FROM NOW ON.



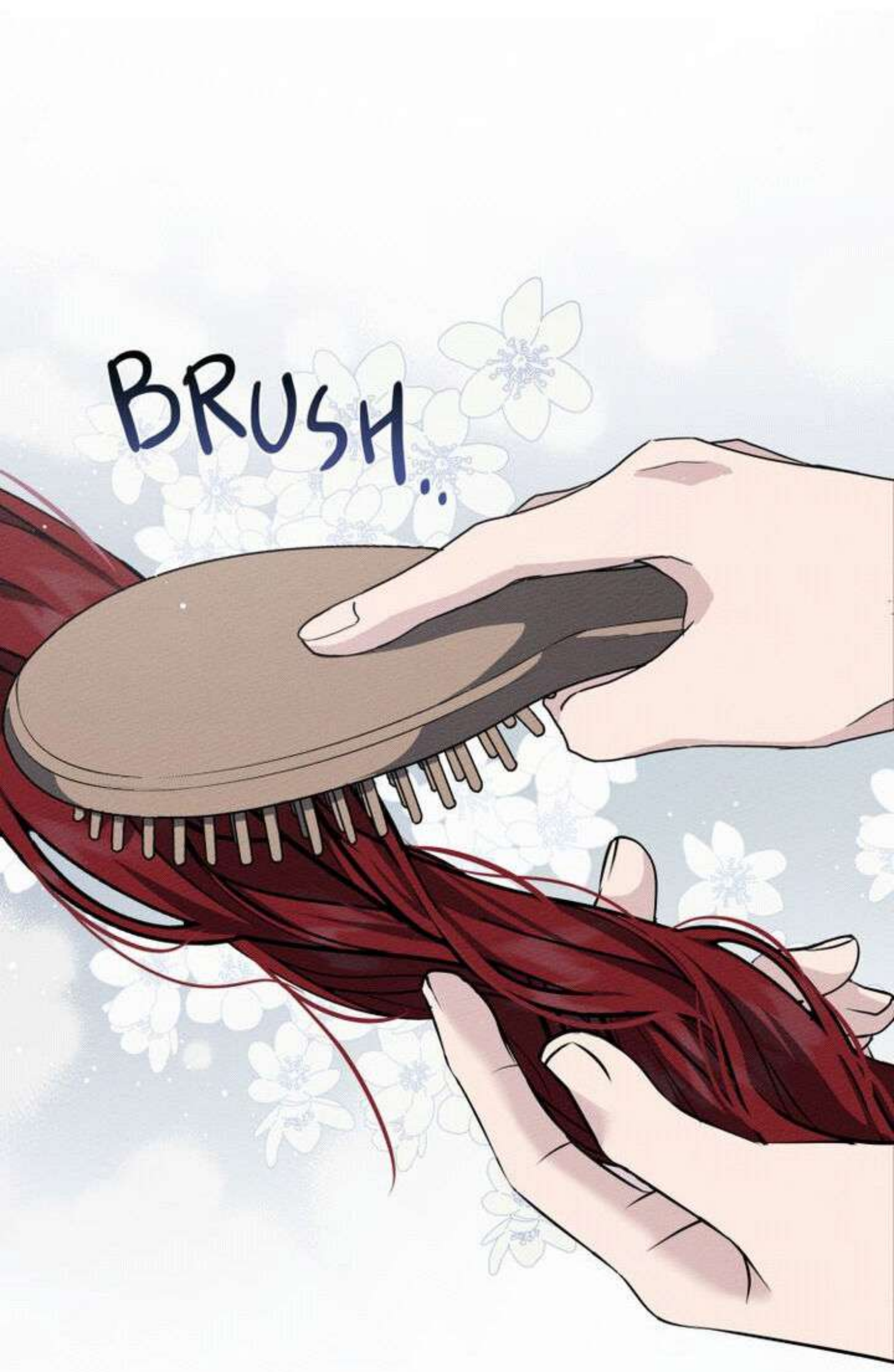

I'M TOLD THE LORD WENT TO THE TRAINING HALL EARLY THIS MORNING.
OH...

WHEN DID RIFTAN LEAVE?

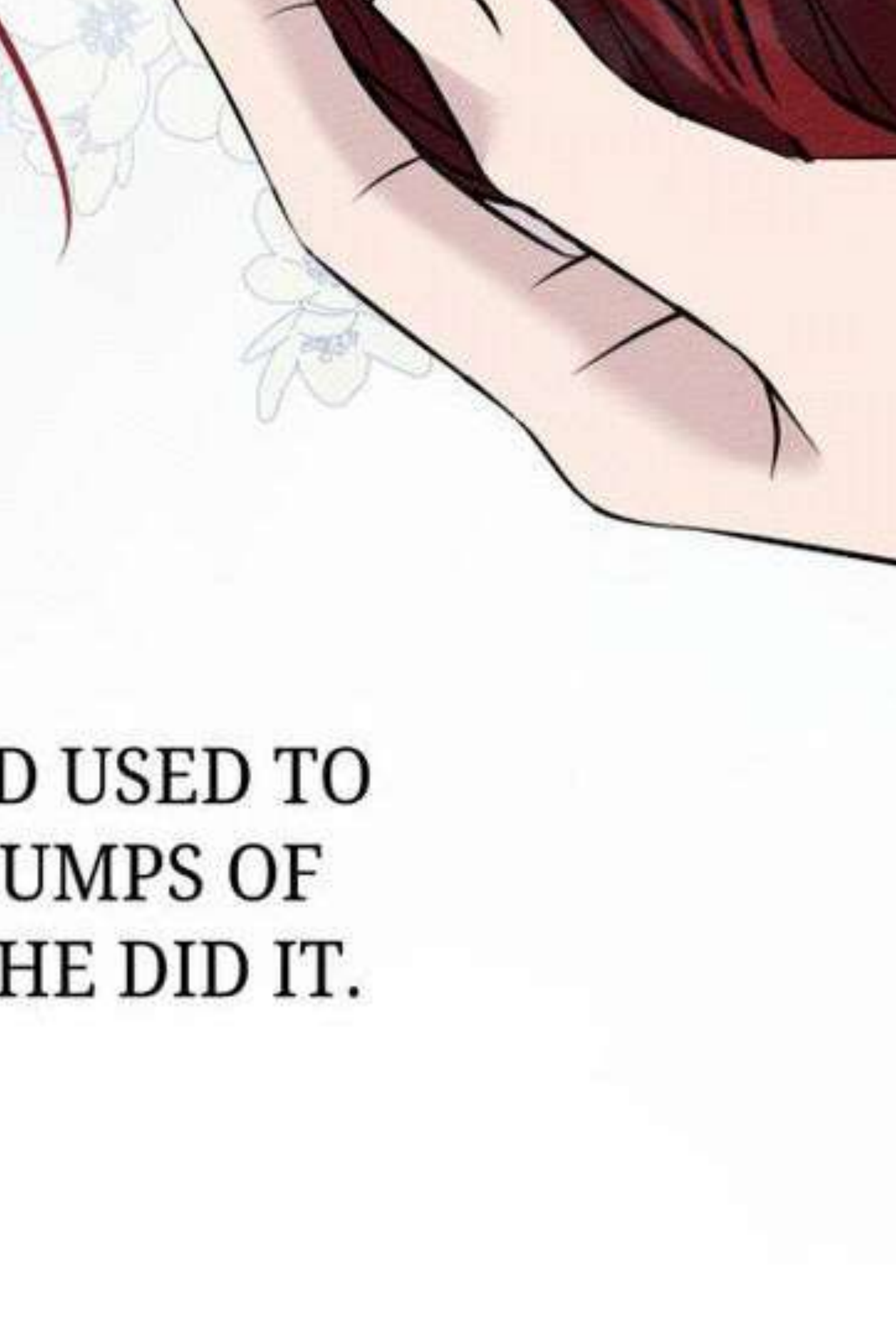
I'M STILL NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THE OTHER PEOPLE HERE.


WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO BRAID YOUR HAIR, MY LADY?
Y-YES...

SHE'S BRUSHING MY HAIR SO GENTLY I CAN FEEL MYSELF RELAXING.

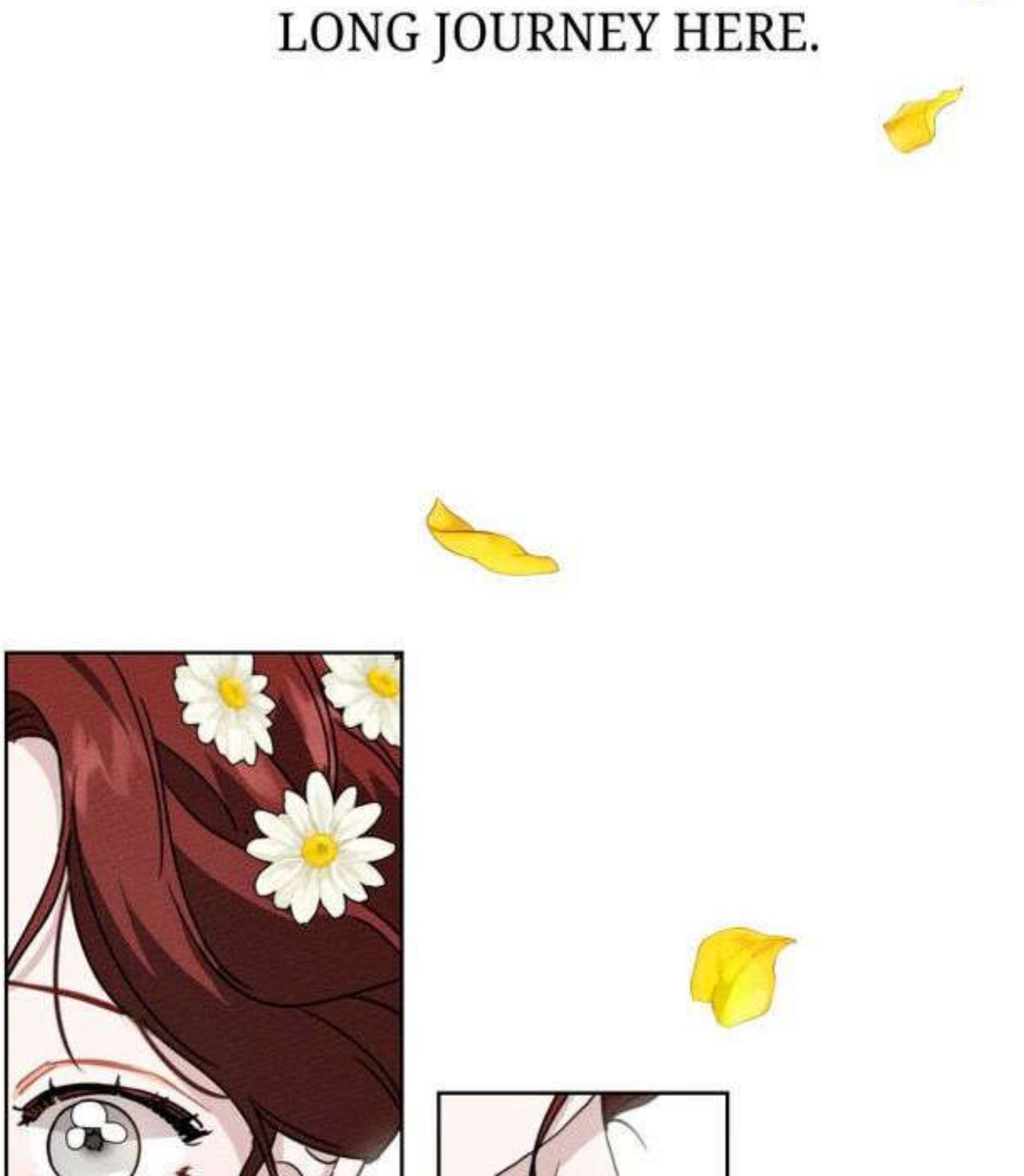


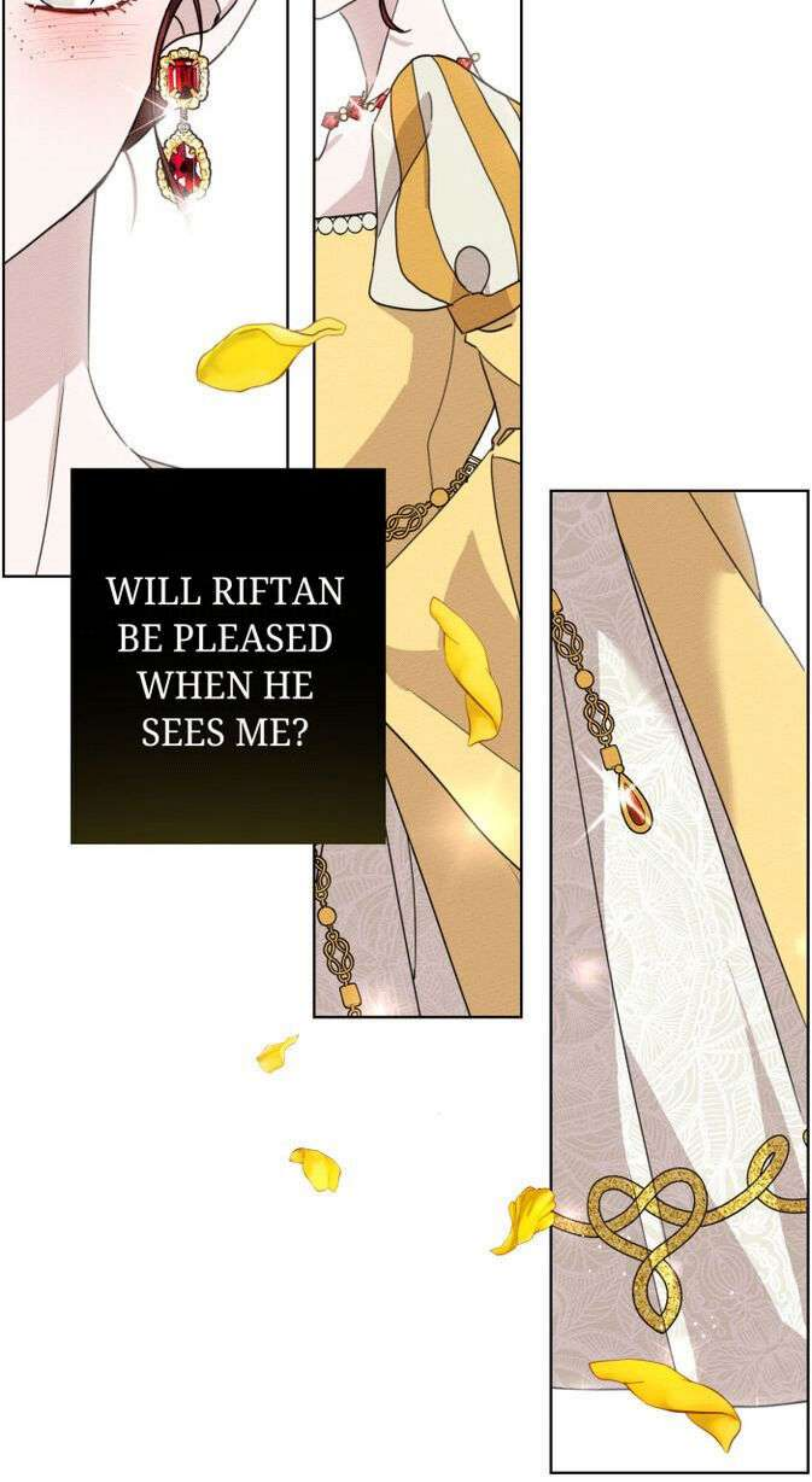
MY NURSEMAID USED TO YANK OUT CLUMPS OF HAIR WHEN SHE DID IT.

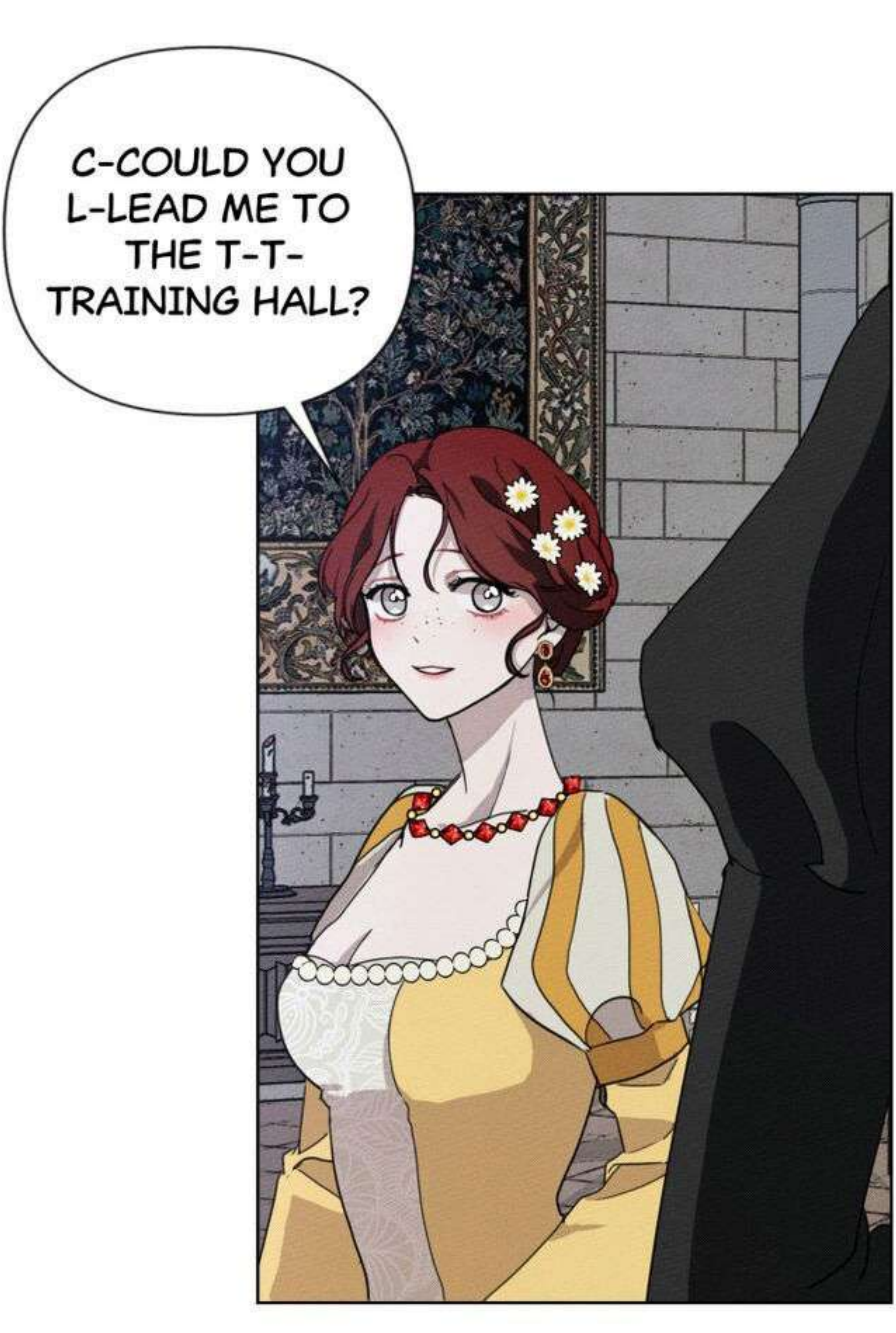

ALL DONE, MY LADY.
HEHE

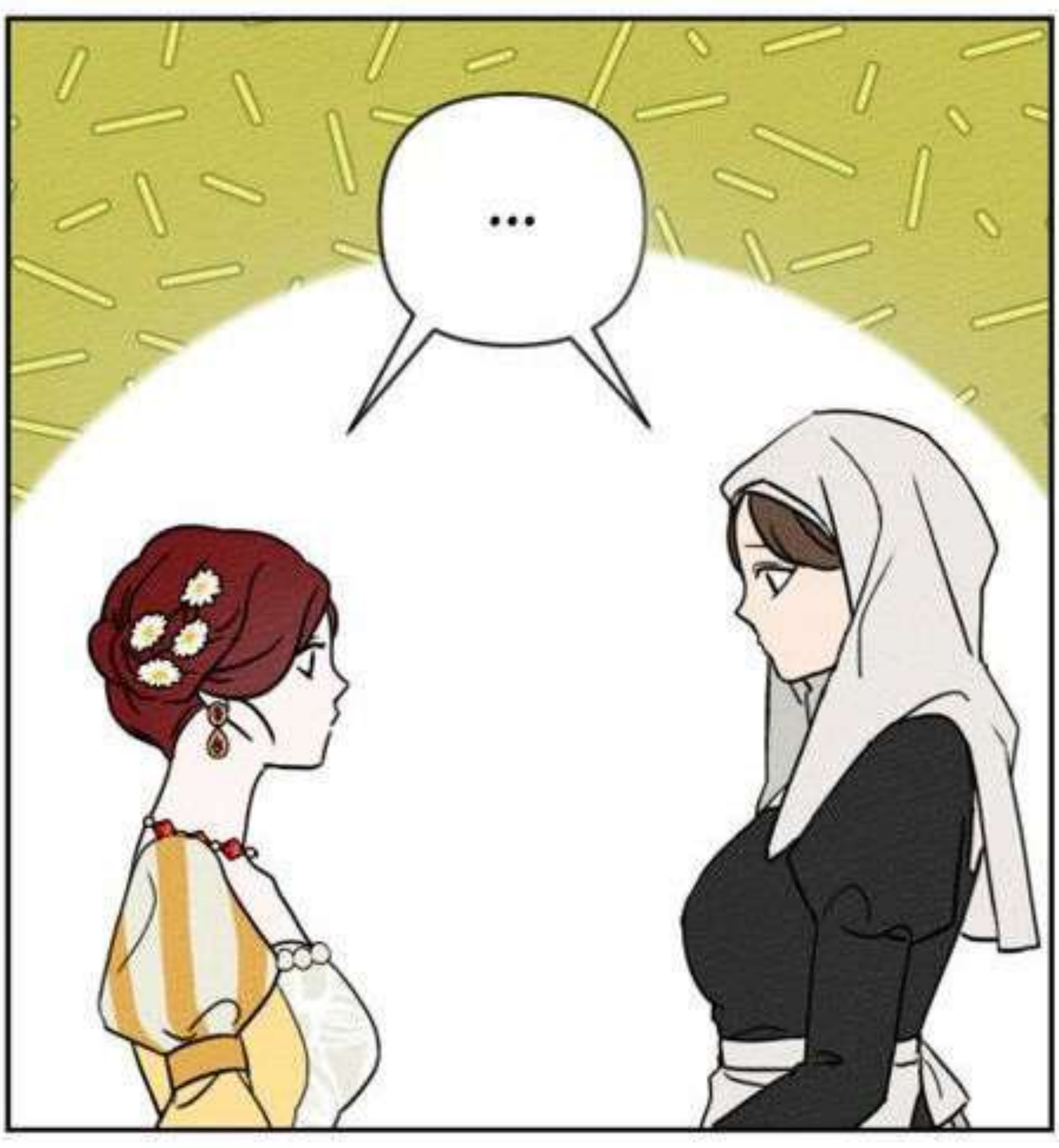
HOW PRETTY.

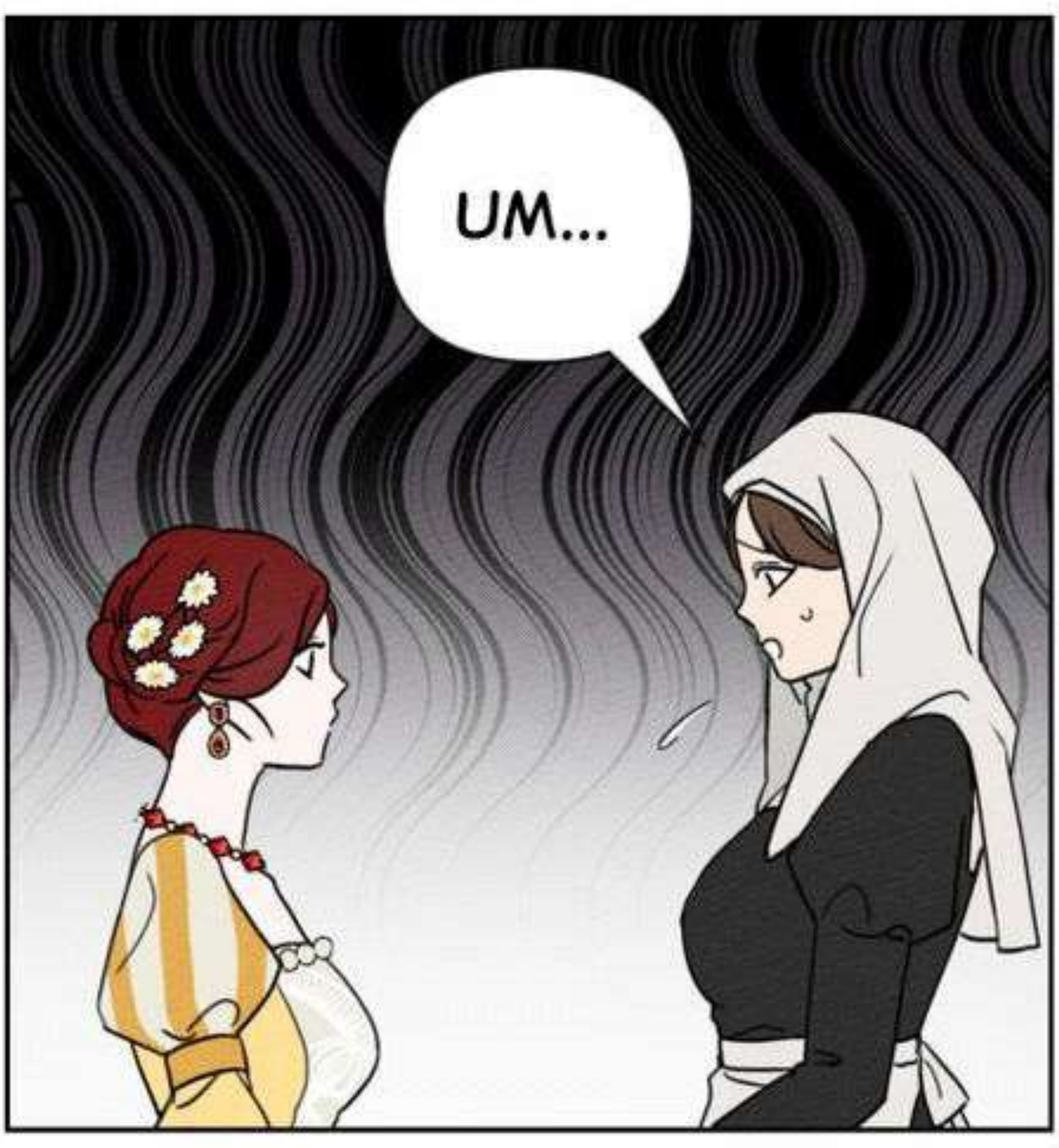
I FEEL LIKE A DIFFERENT PERSON AFTER THAT LONG JOURNEY HERE.

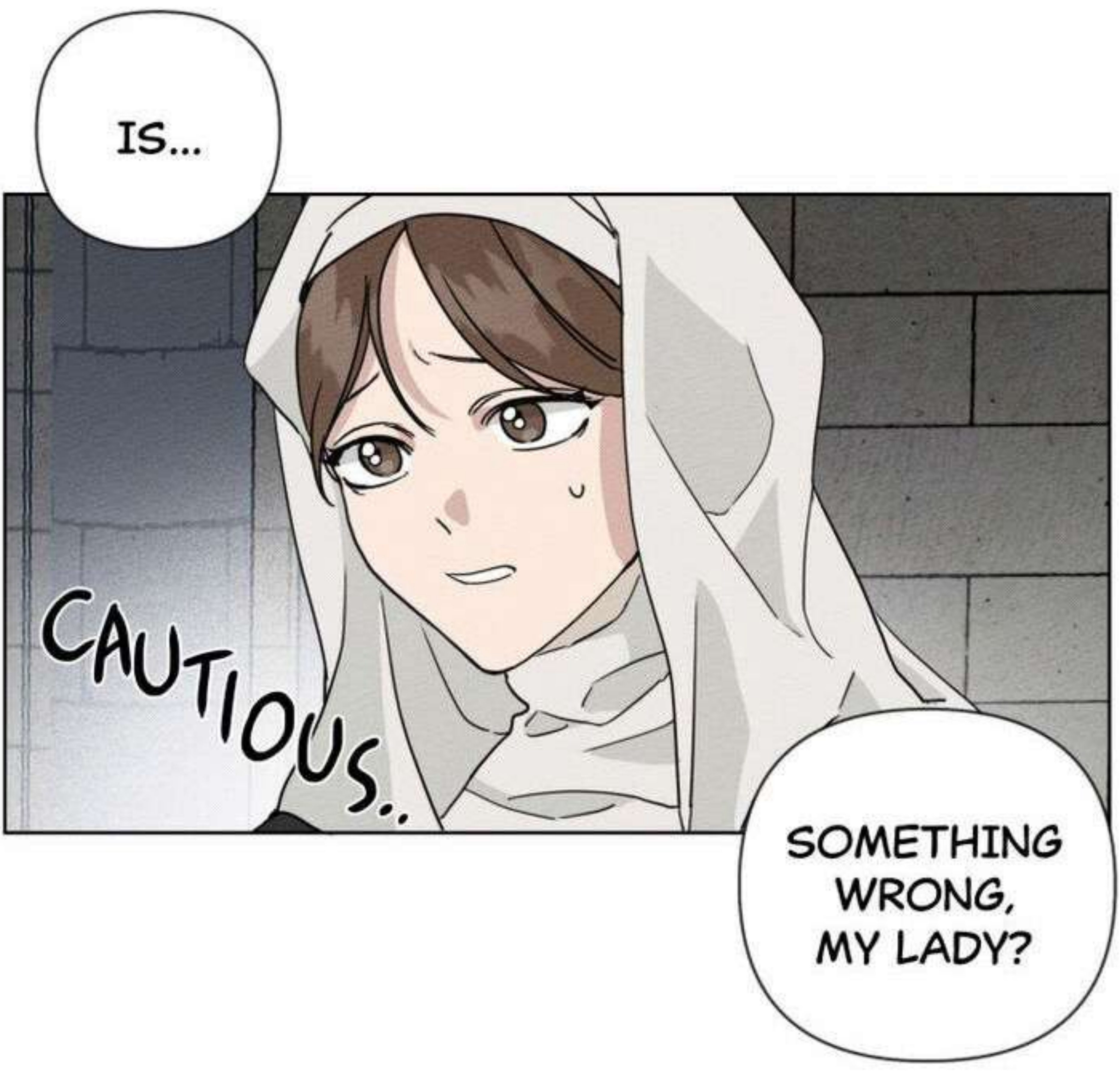


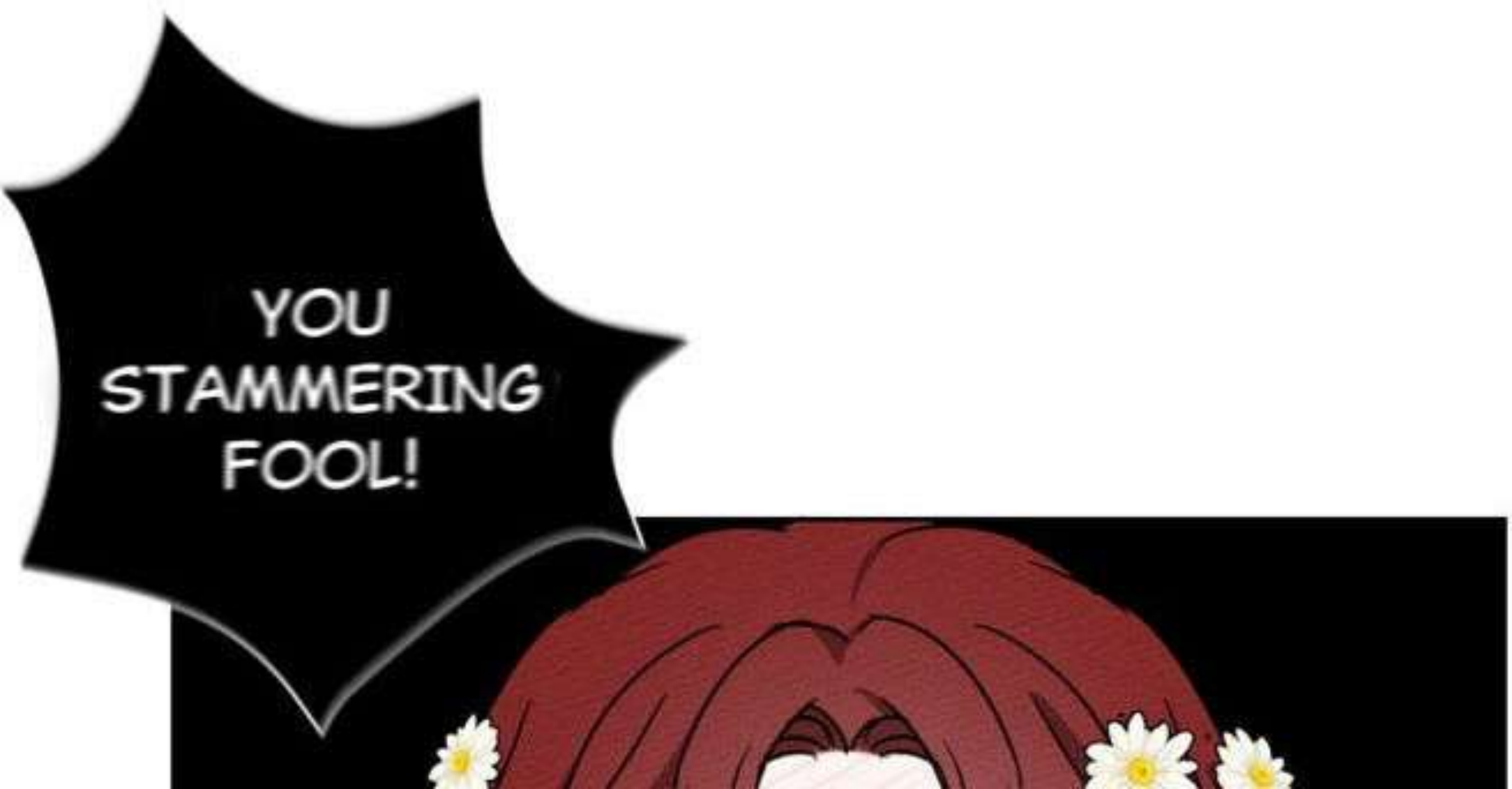

WILL RIFTAN BE PLEASED WHEN HE SEES ME?

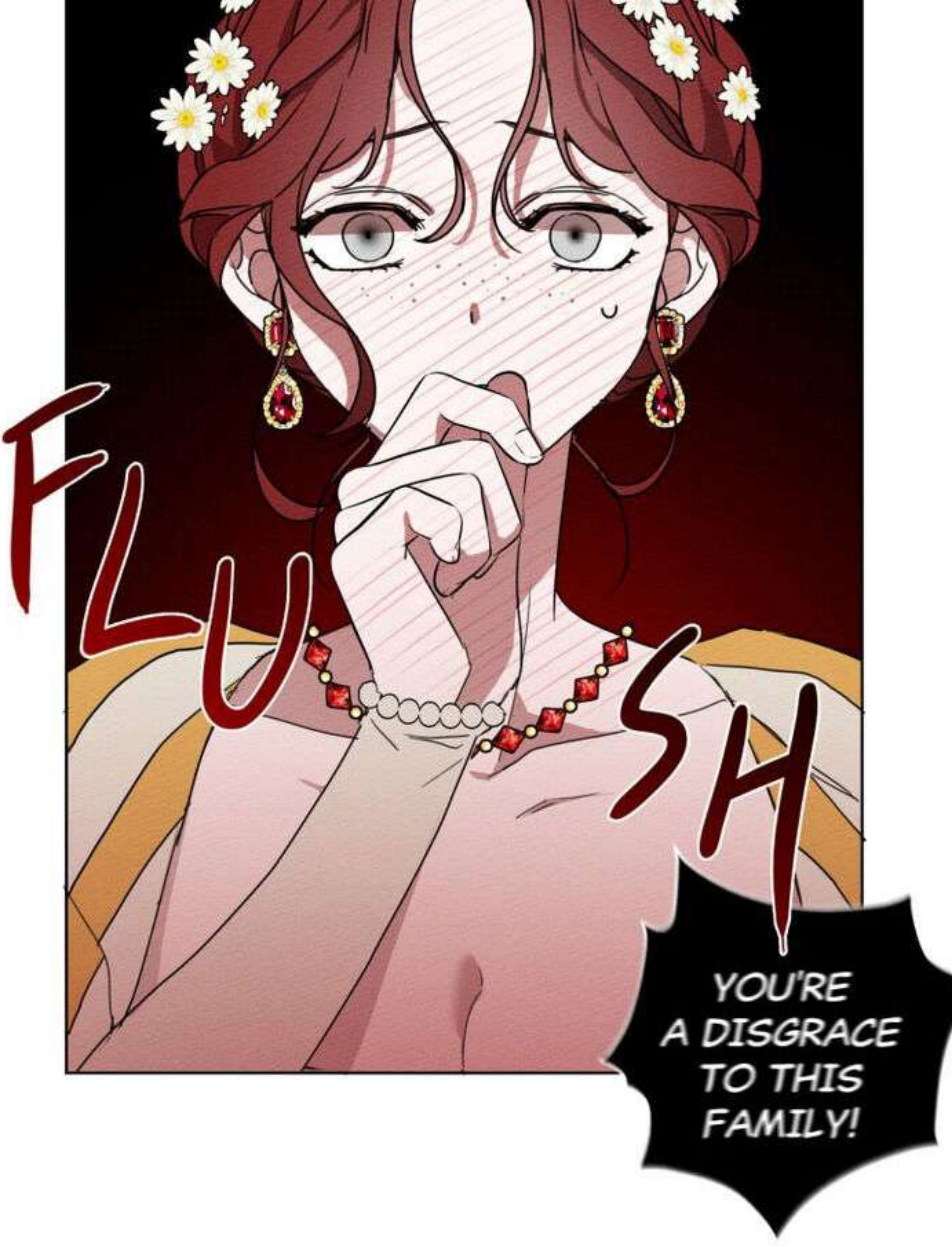

C-COULD YOU L-LEAD ME TO THE T-T-TRAINING HALL?


...

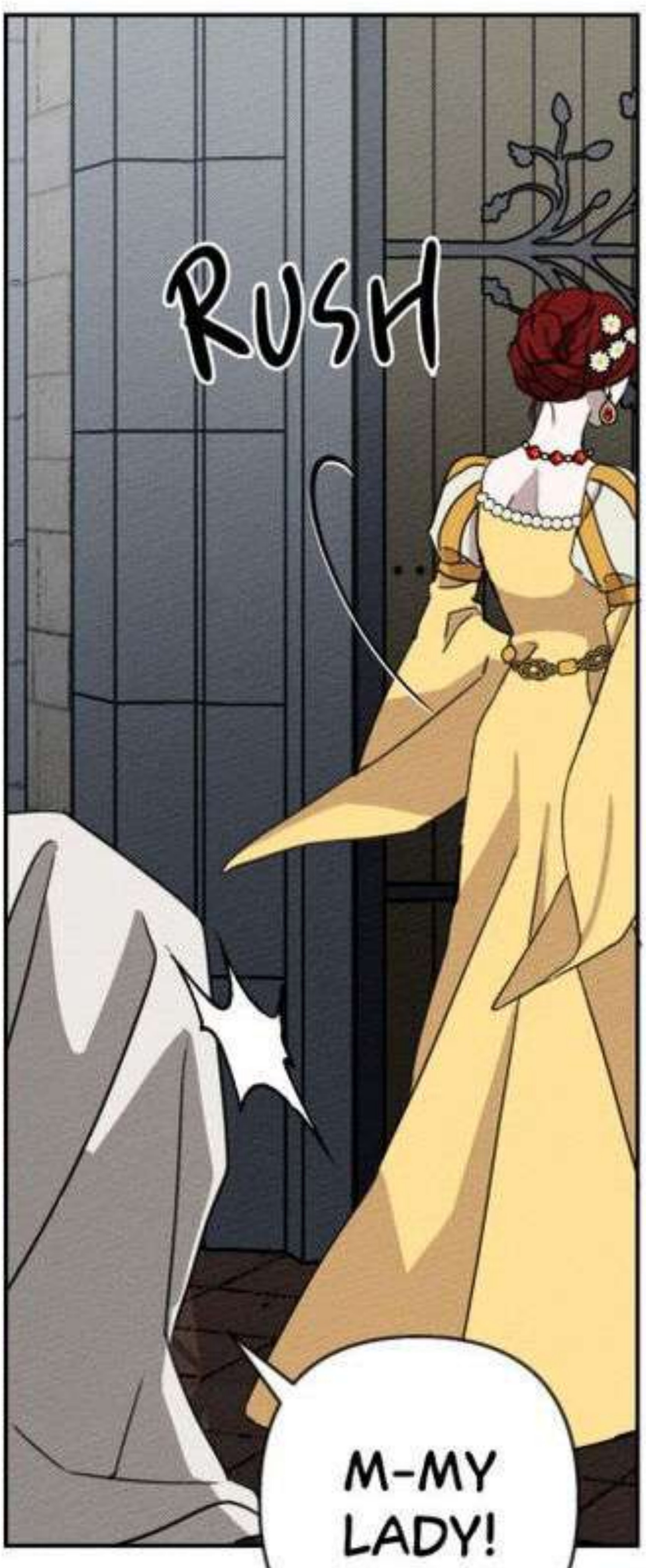

UM...


IS...
CAUTIOUS..
SOMETHING WRONG, MY LADY?


YOU STAMMERING FOOL!


FLUSH
YOU'RE A DISGRACE TO THIS FAMILY!

E-EVERYTHING IS F-F-FINE.

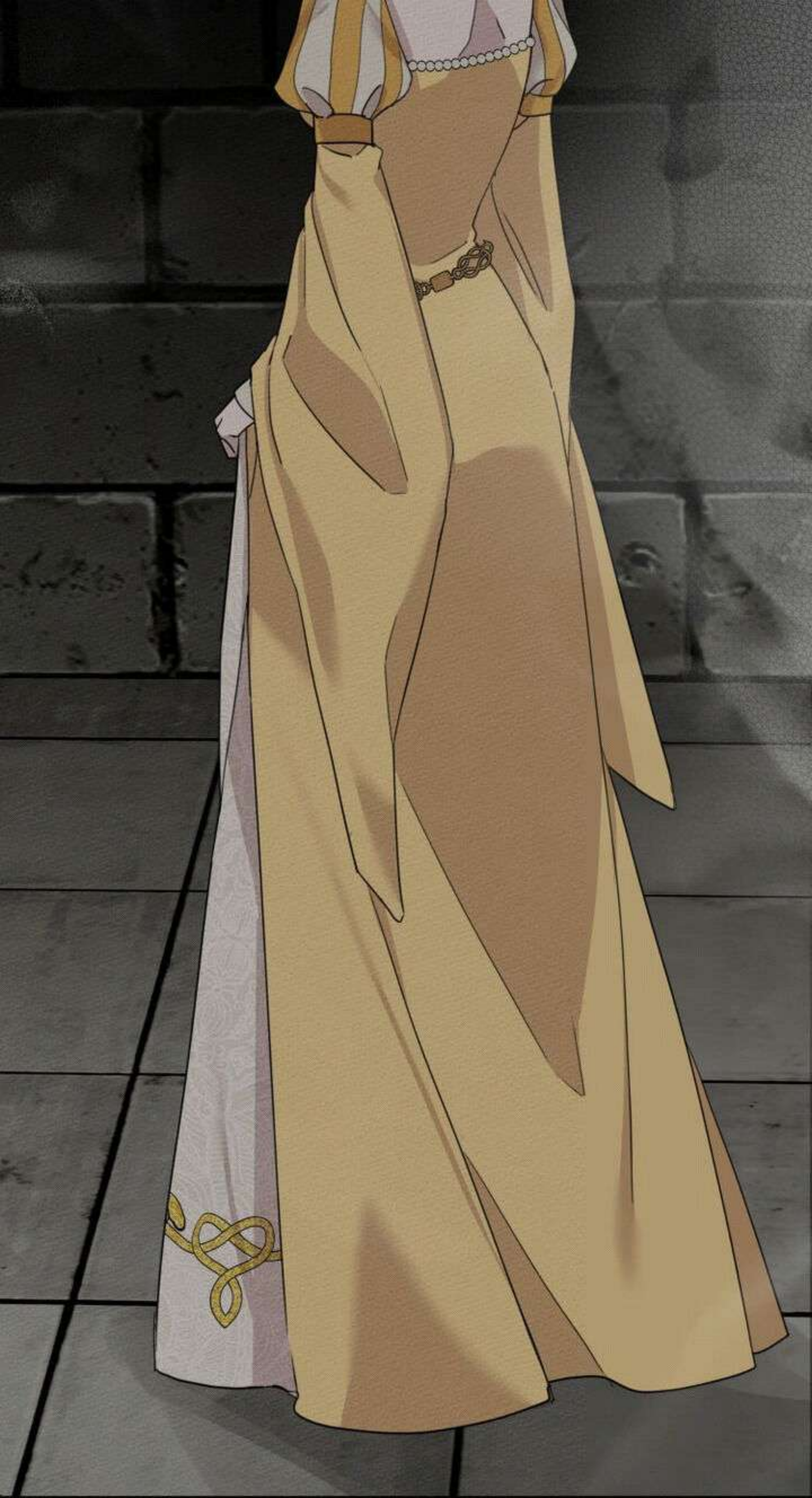

RUSH
M-MY LADY!

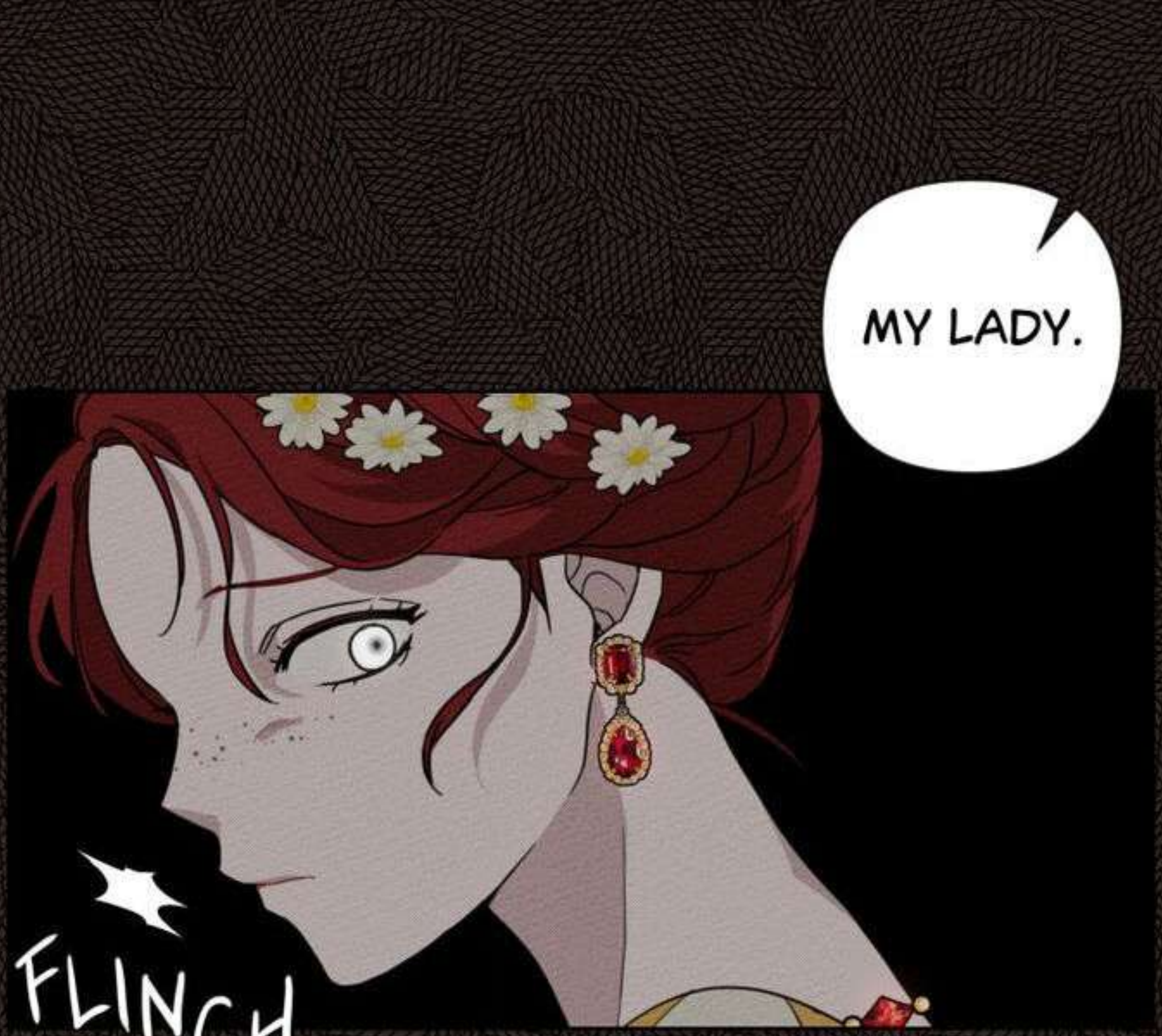
STEP
HOW MORTIFYING.

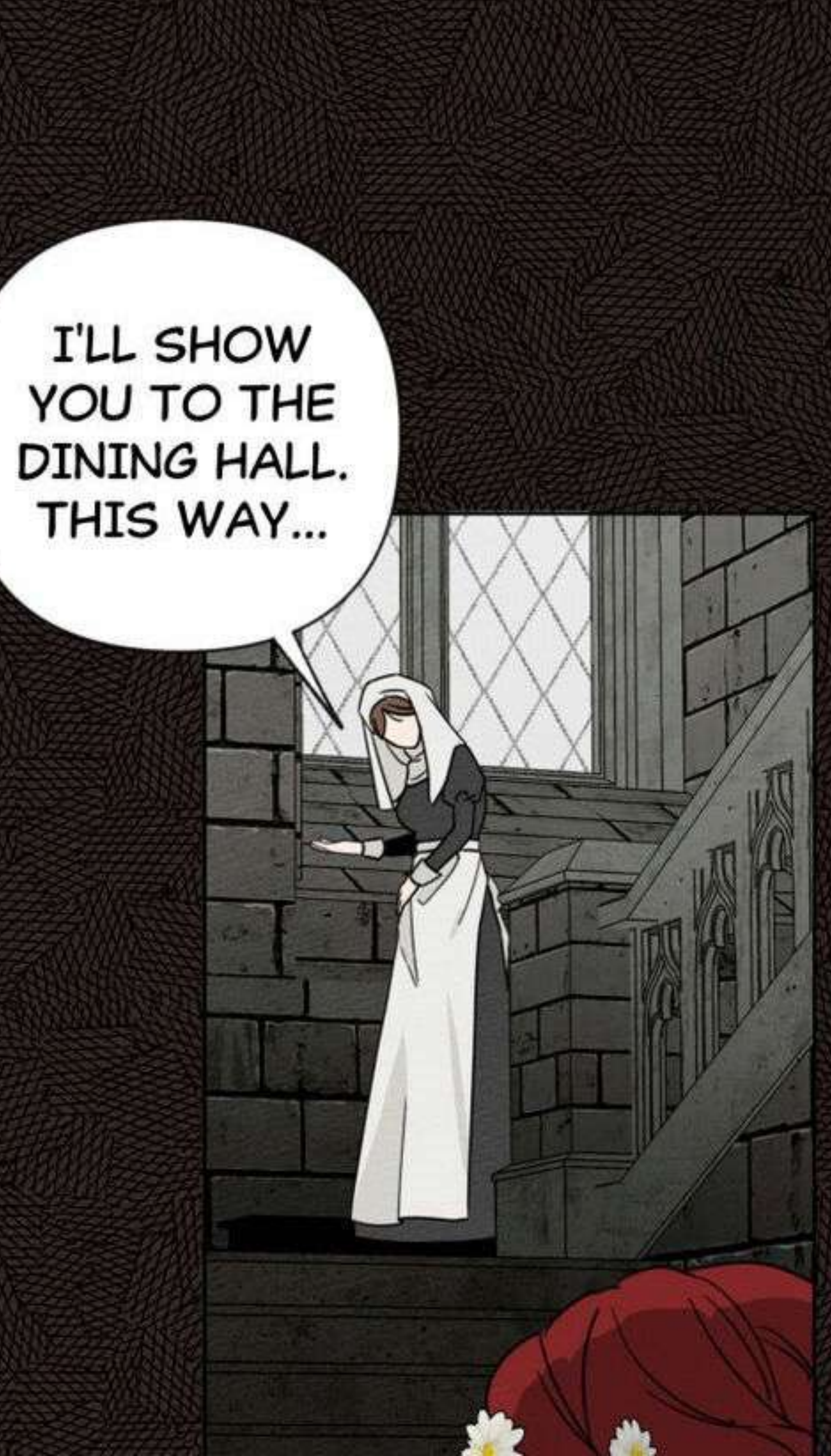
STEP

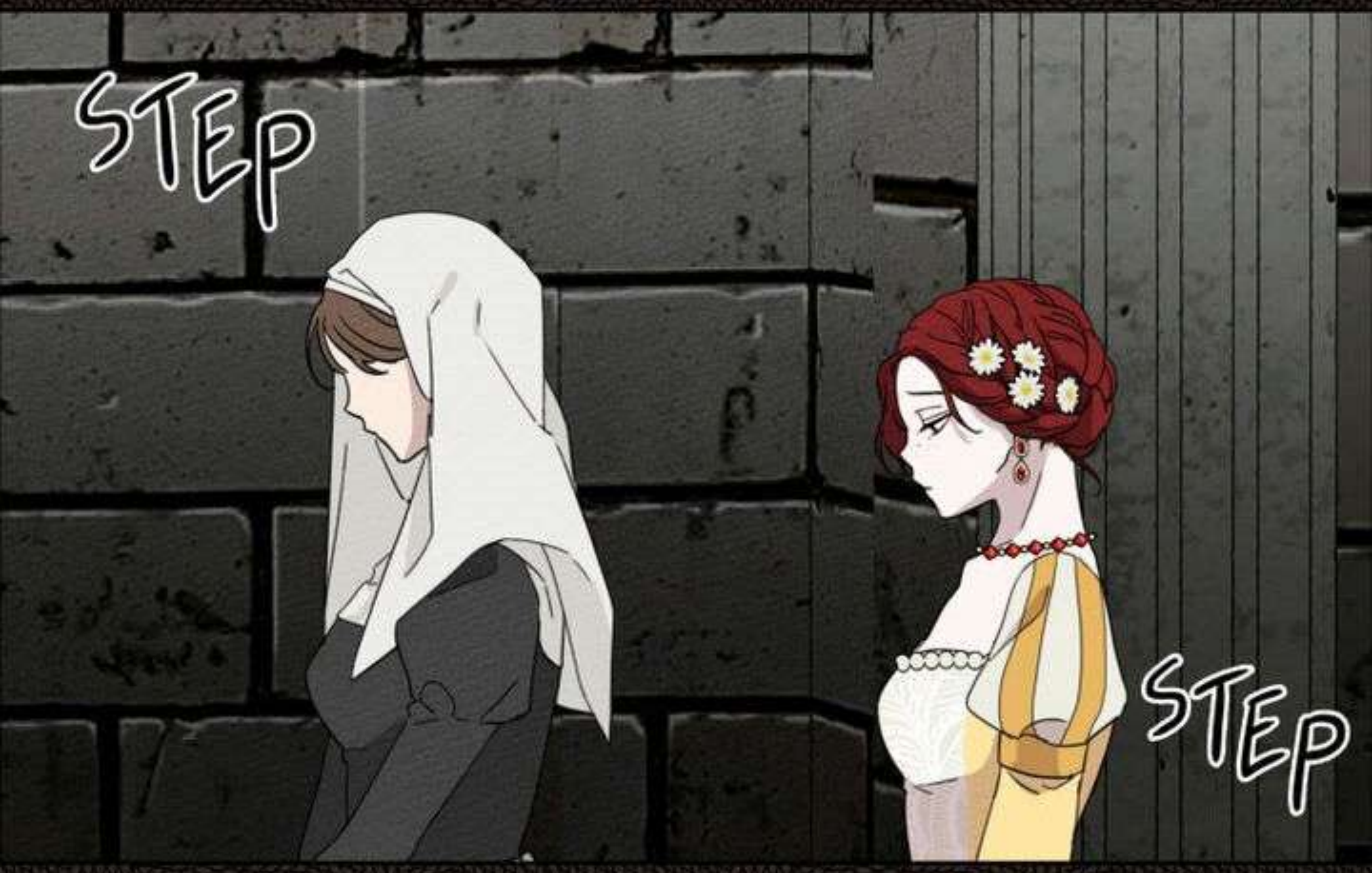
HOW COULD I FORGET?
STEP
JUST BECAUSE RIFTAN DOESN'T MIND,
STEP

DOESN'T MEAN MY AFFLICTION IS GONE...
WHAT IF...
CLENCH
THEY LAUGH AT ME?

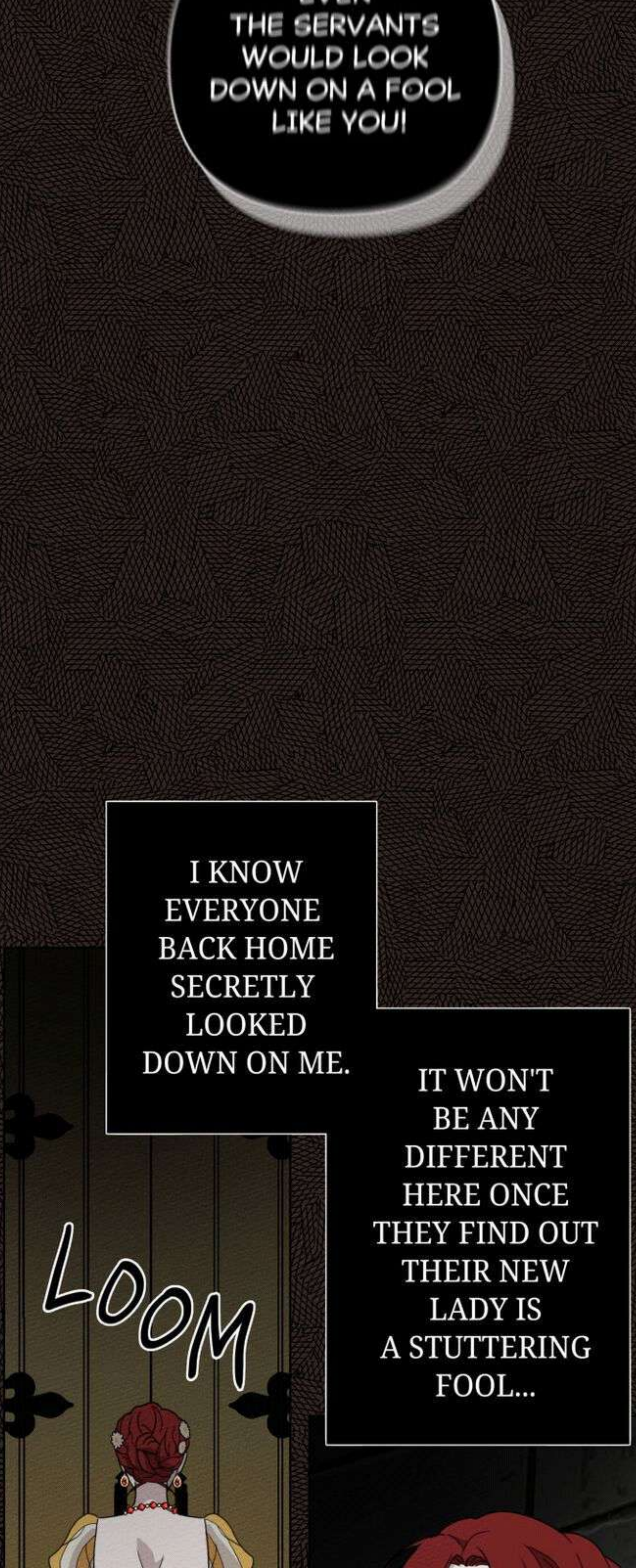


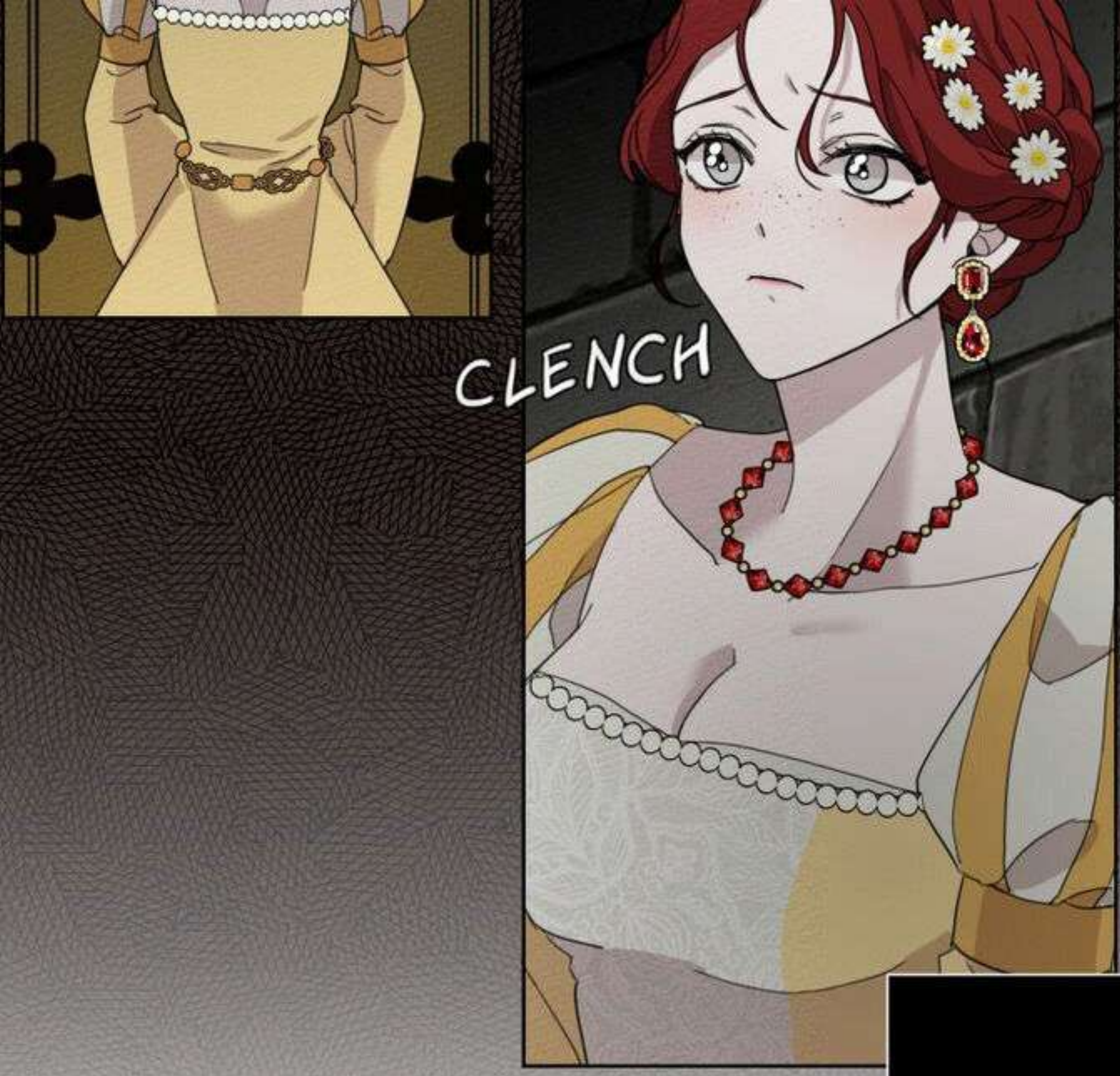

MY LADY.
FLINCH


I'LL SHOW YOU TO THE DINING HALL. THIS WAY...


STEP
STEP

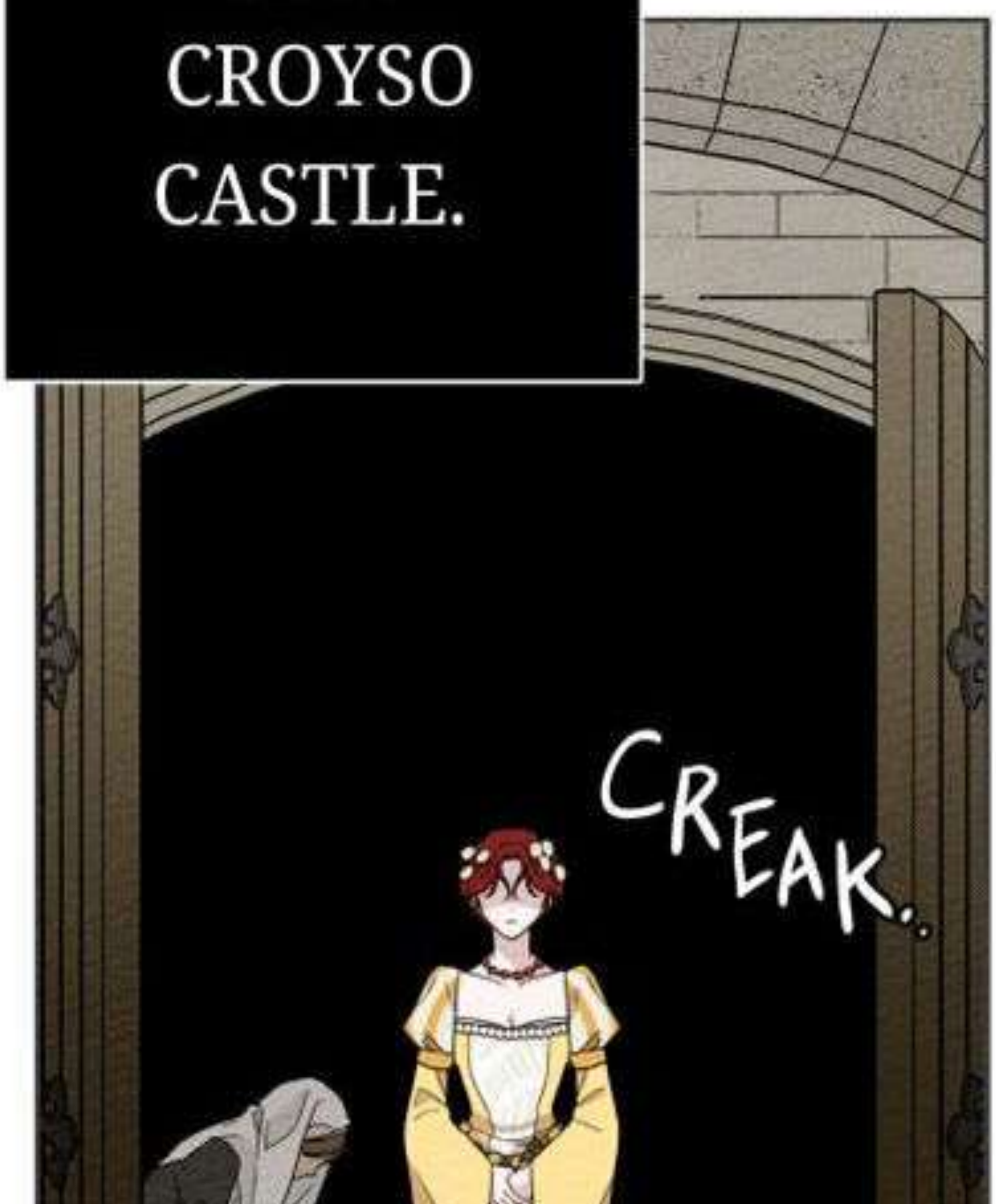
EVEN THE SERVANTS WOULD LOOK DOWN ON A FOOL LIKE YOU!


I KNOW EVERYONE BACK HOME SECRETLY LOOKED DOWN ON ME.
IT WON'T BE ANY DIFFERENT HERE ONCE THEY FIND OUT THEIR NEW LADY IS A STUTTERING FOOL...
LOOM

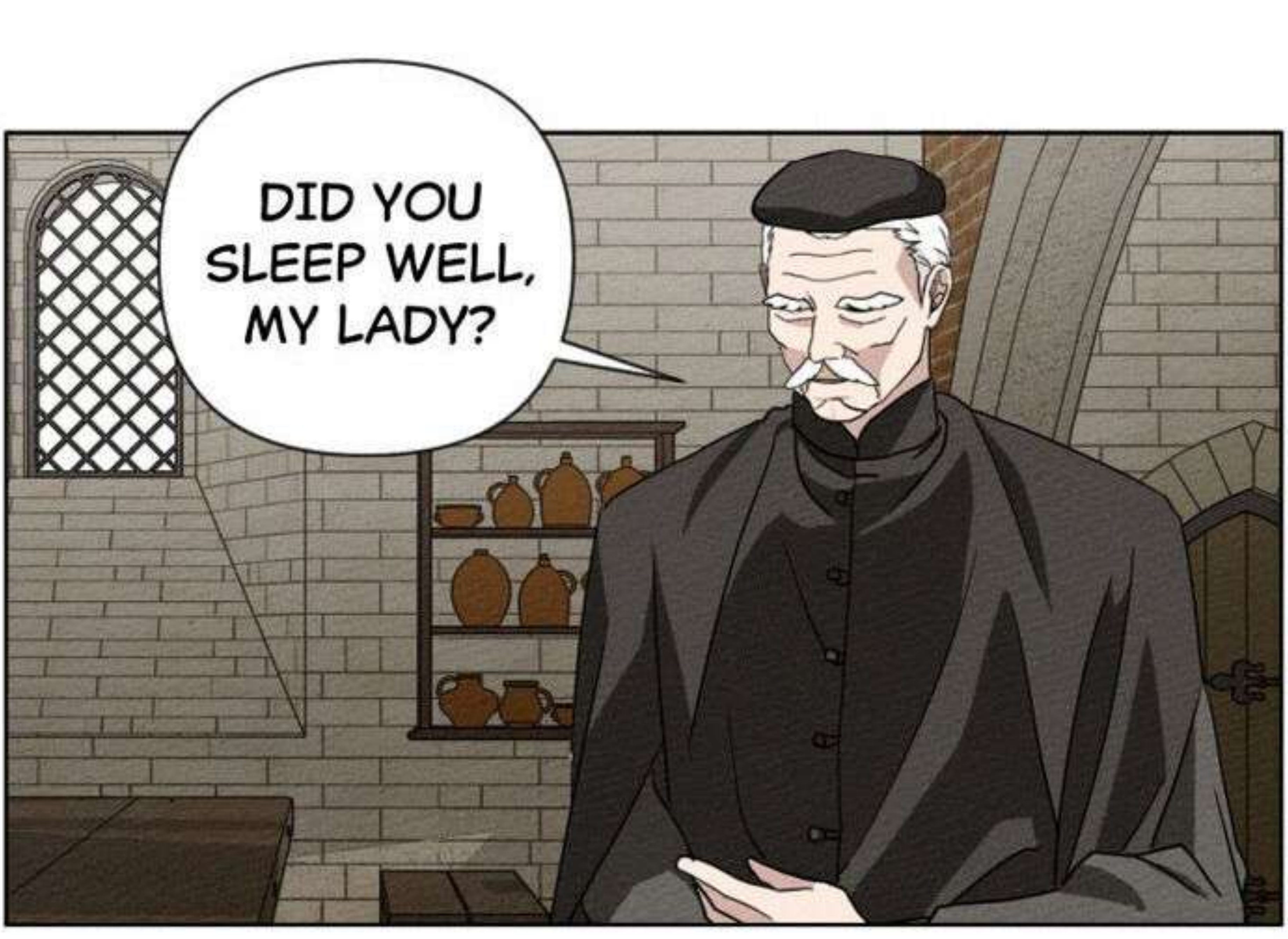


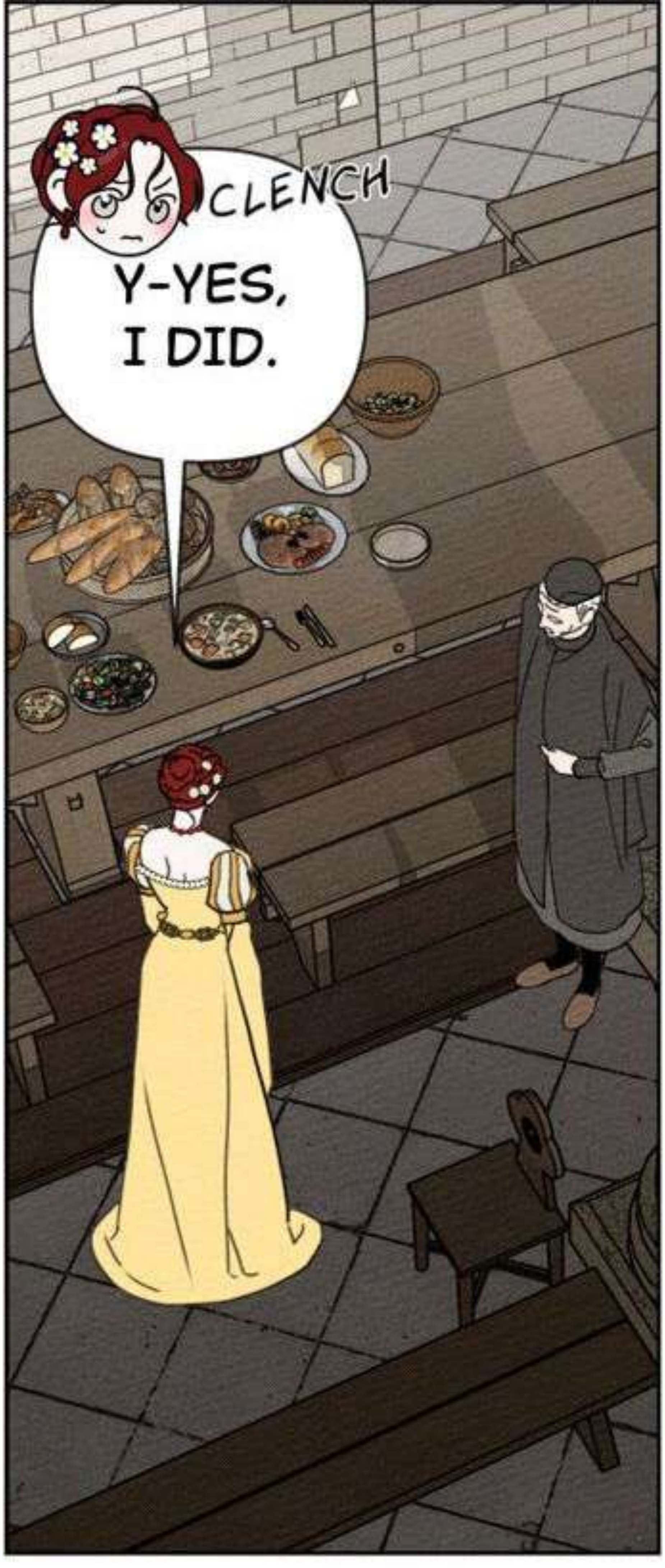
NO.

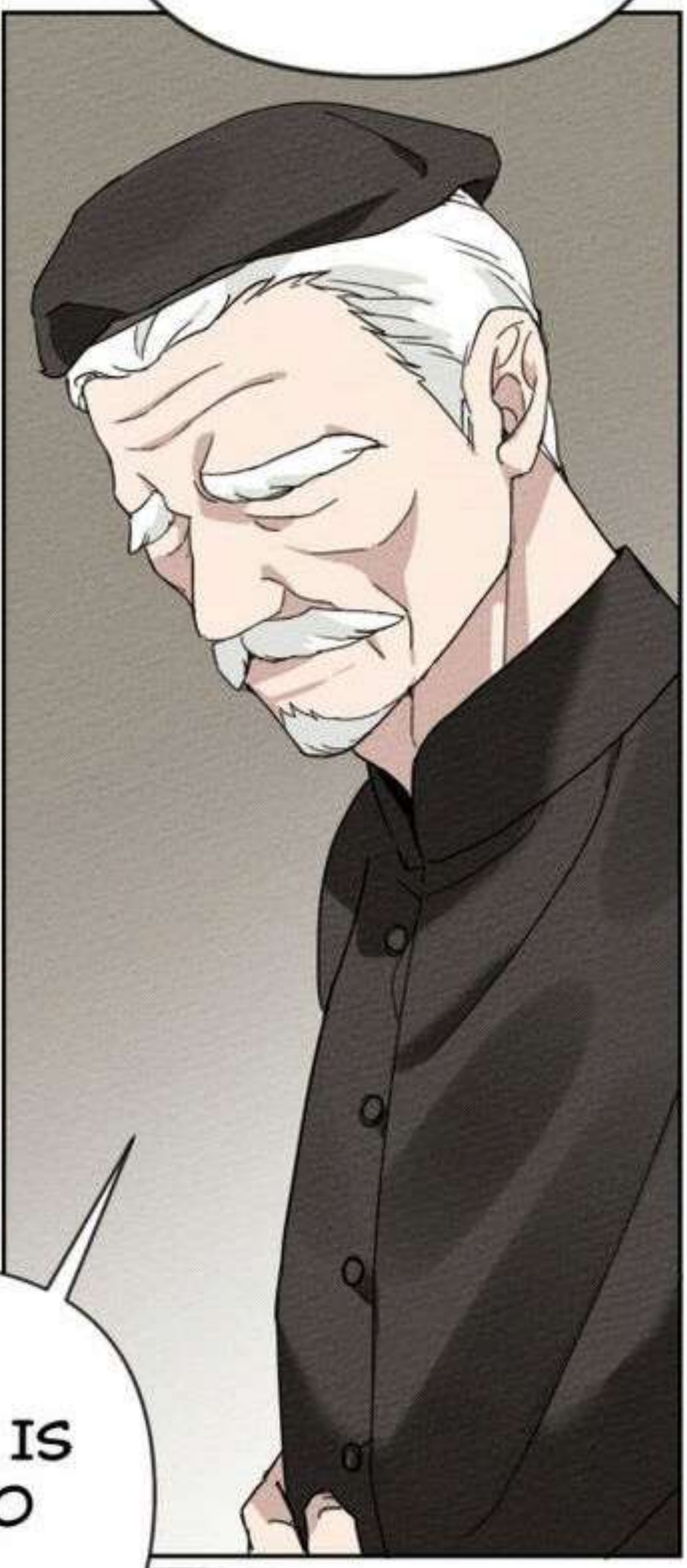
THIS ISN'T THE CROYSO CASTLE.

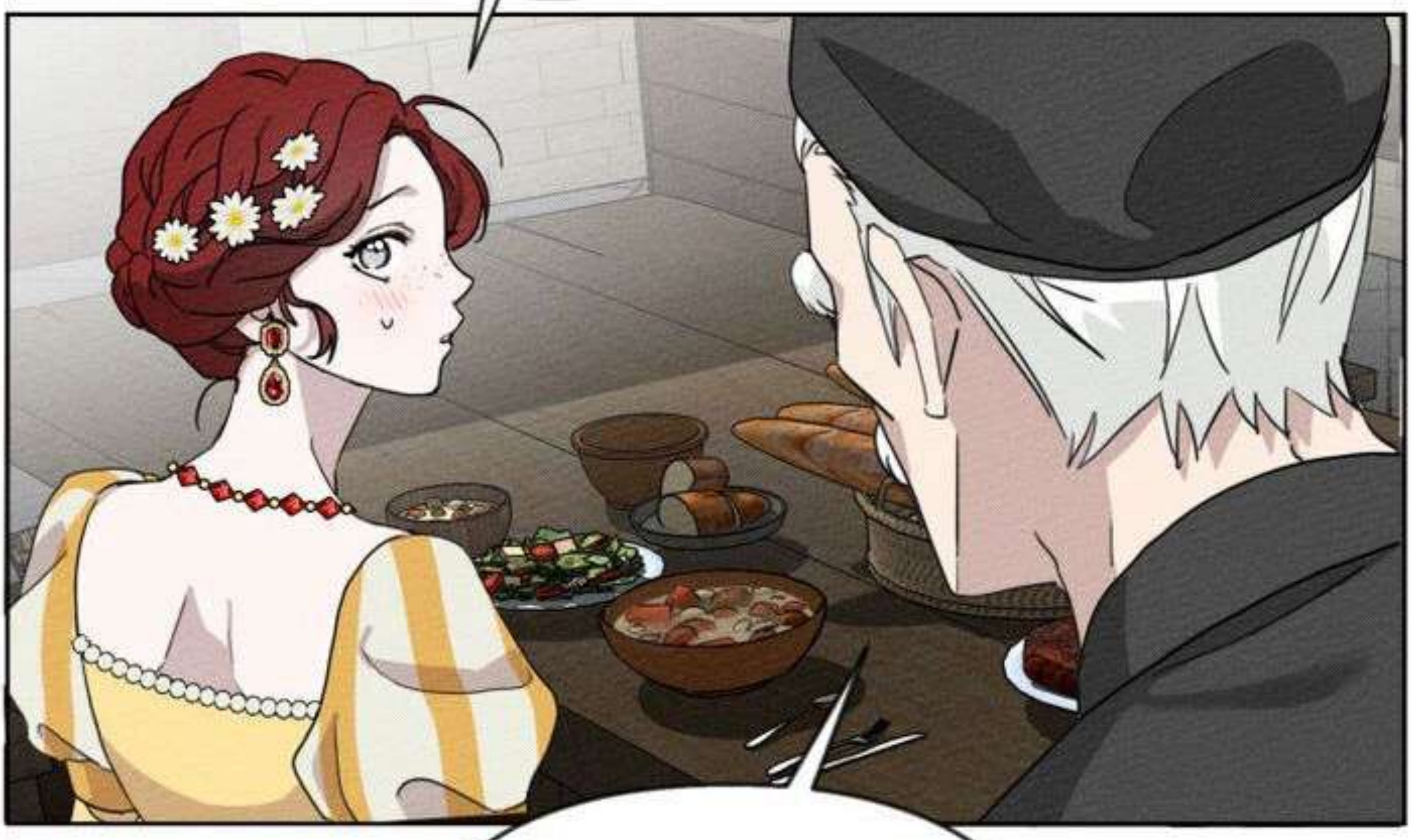


THIS IS ANATOL.


DID YOU SLEEP WELL, MY LADY?

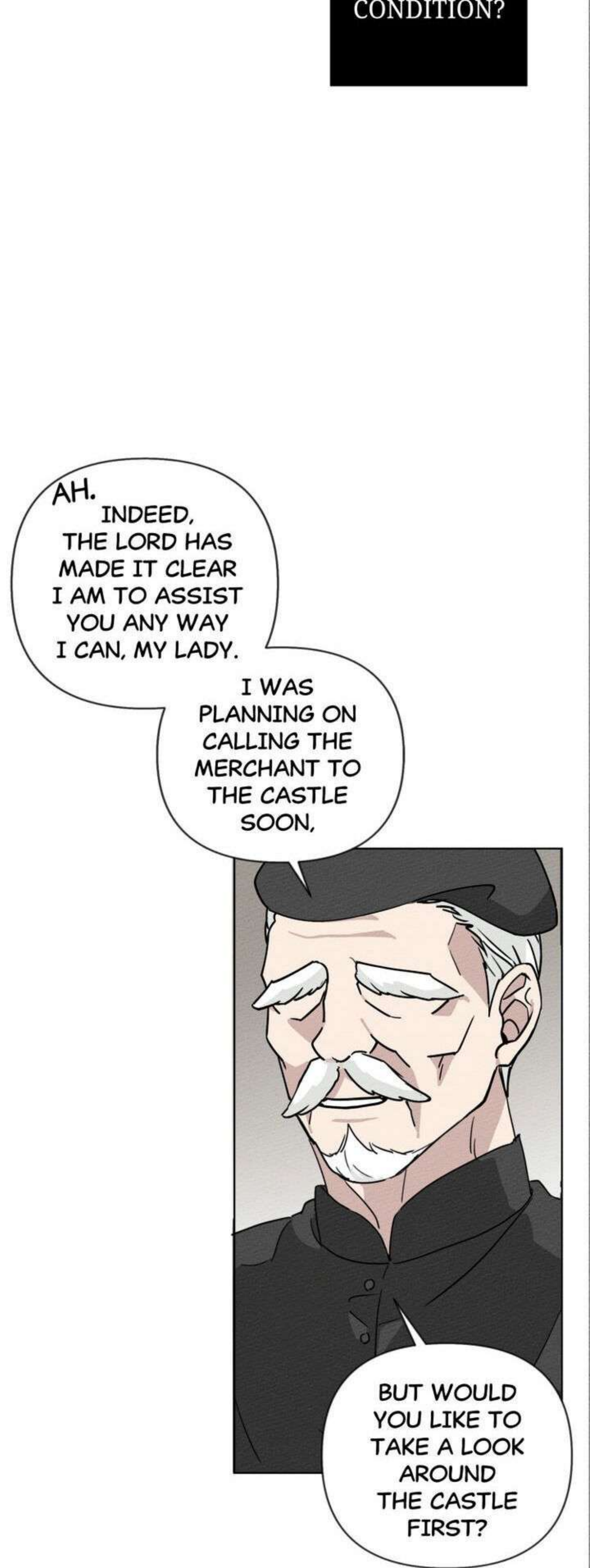

CLENCH
Y-YES, I DID.

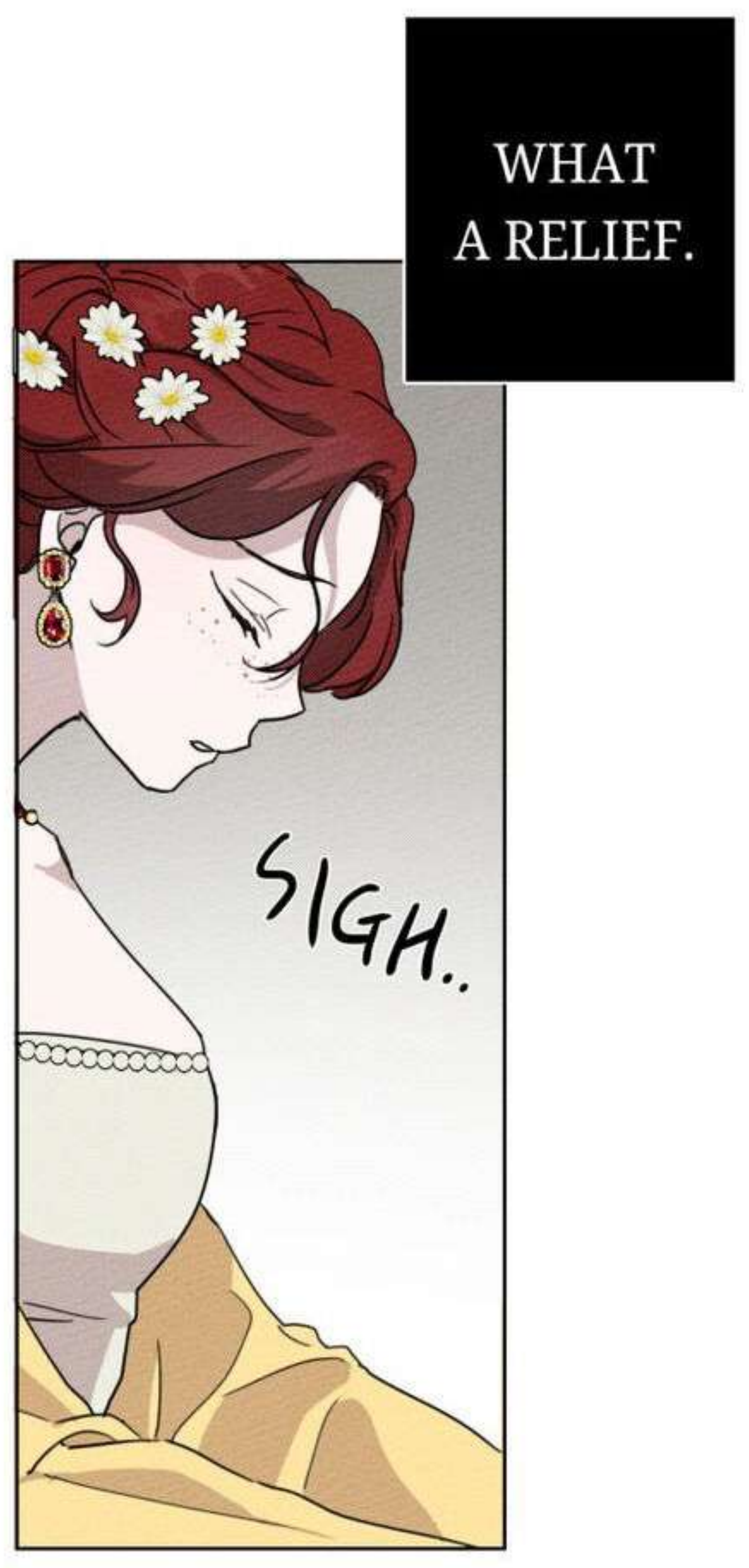

I APOLOGIZE FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO INTRODUCE MYSELF YESTERDAY.
MY NAME IS RODRIGO CERIC.
I AM IN CHARGE OF ALL THE SERVANTS IN THIS CASTLE.

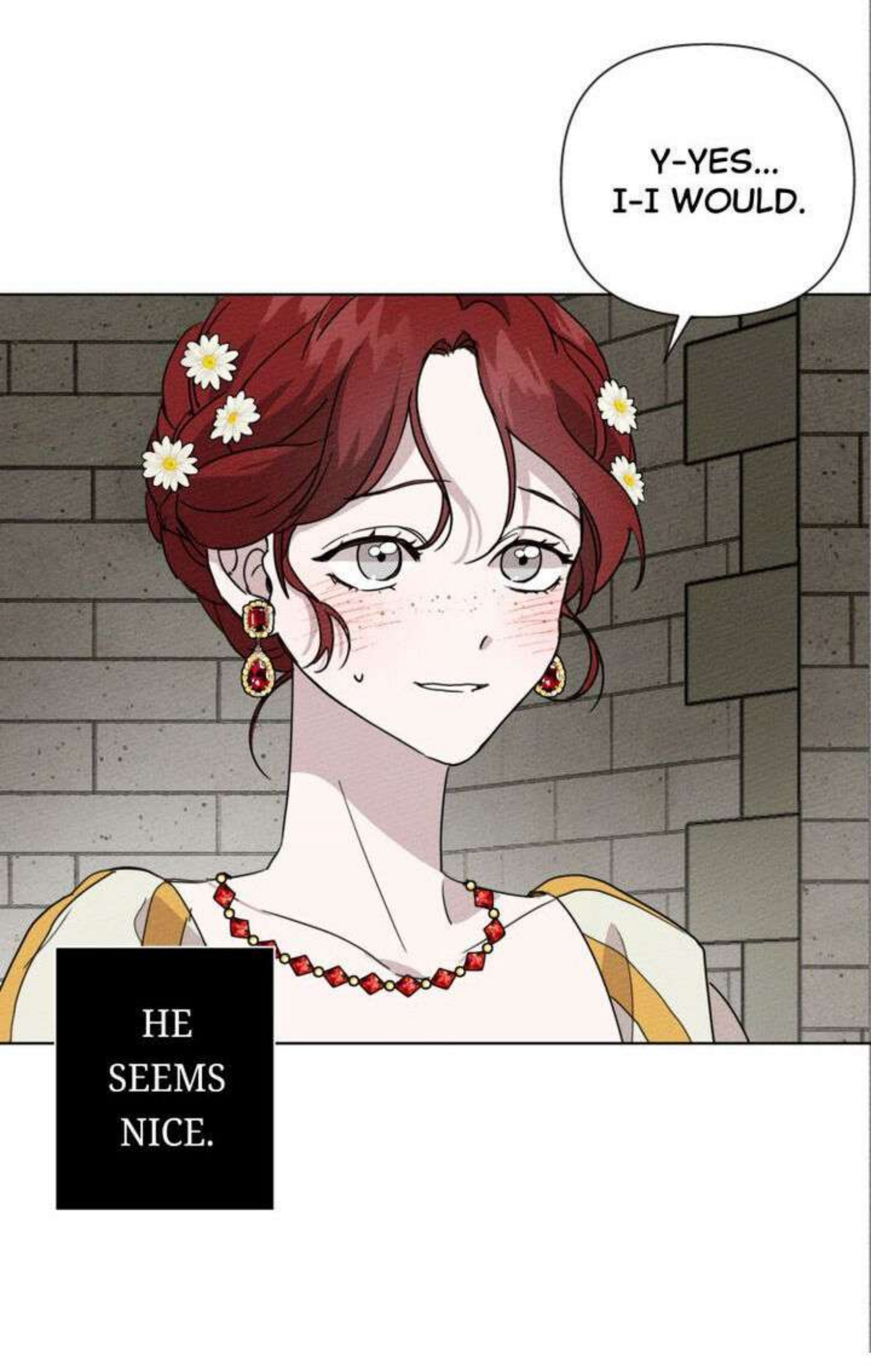

N-NICE TO M-MEET YOU.
I AM AT YOUR SERVICE, MY LADY. PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF THERE'S ANYTHING YOU NEED.

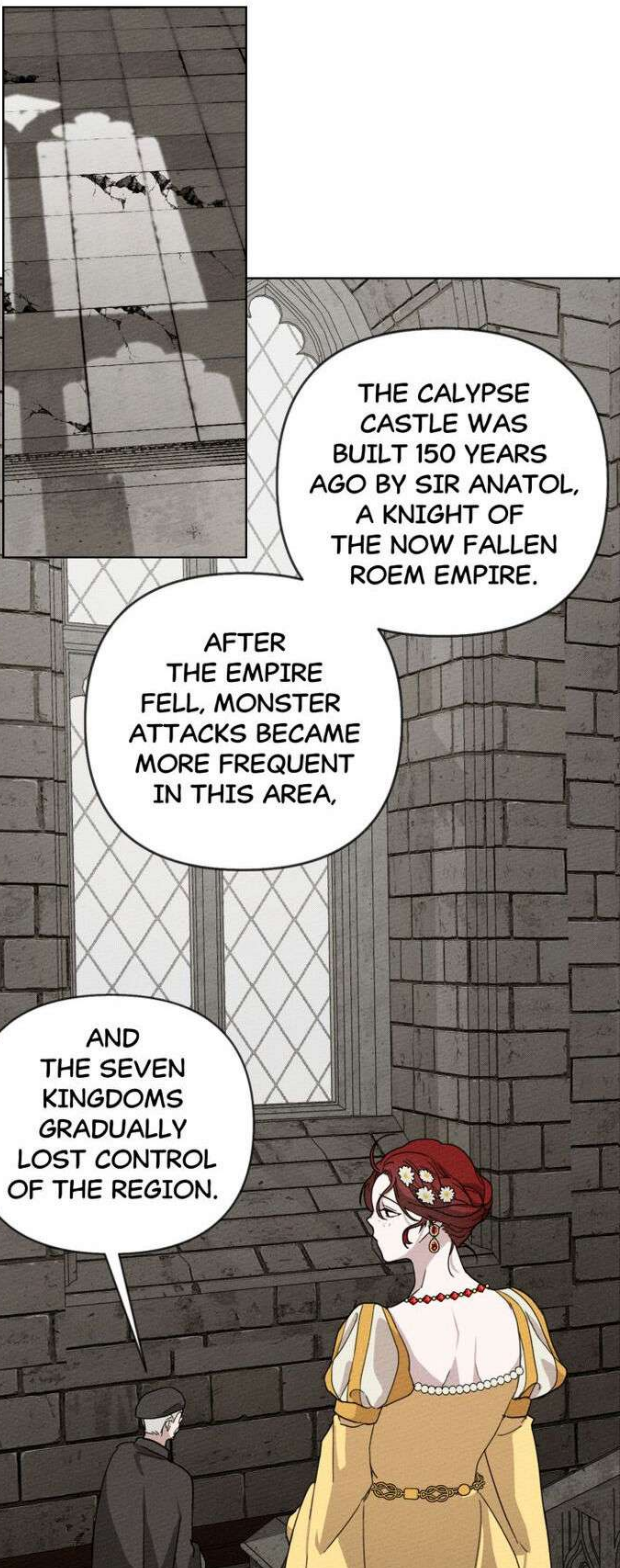
CLENCH
I MUST LOOK LIKE A PROPER LADY.
THE L-LORD T-TOLD ME YESTERDAY
THAT I SH-SHOULD DECORATE THE C-CASTLE...
I MUST REMAIN CALM,

BUT MY VOICE IS SHAKING MORE THAN NORMAL.
WHAT IF HE MOCKS ME
OR LOOKS DOWN ON ME
FOR MY

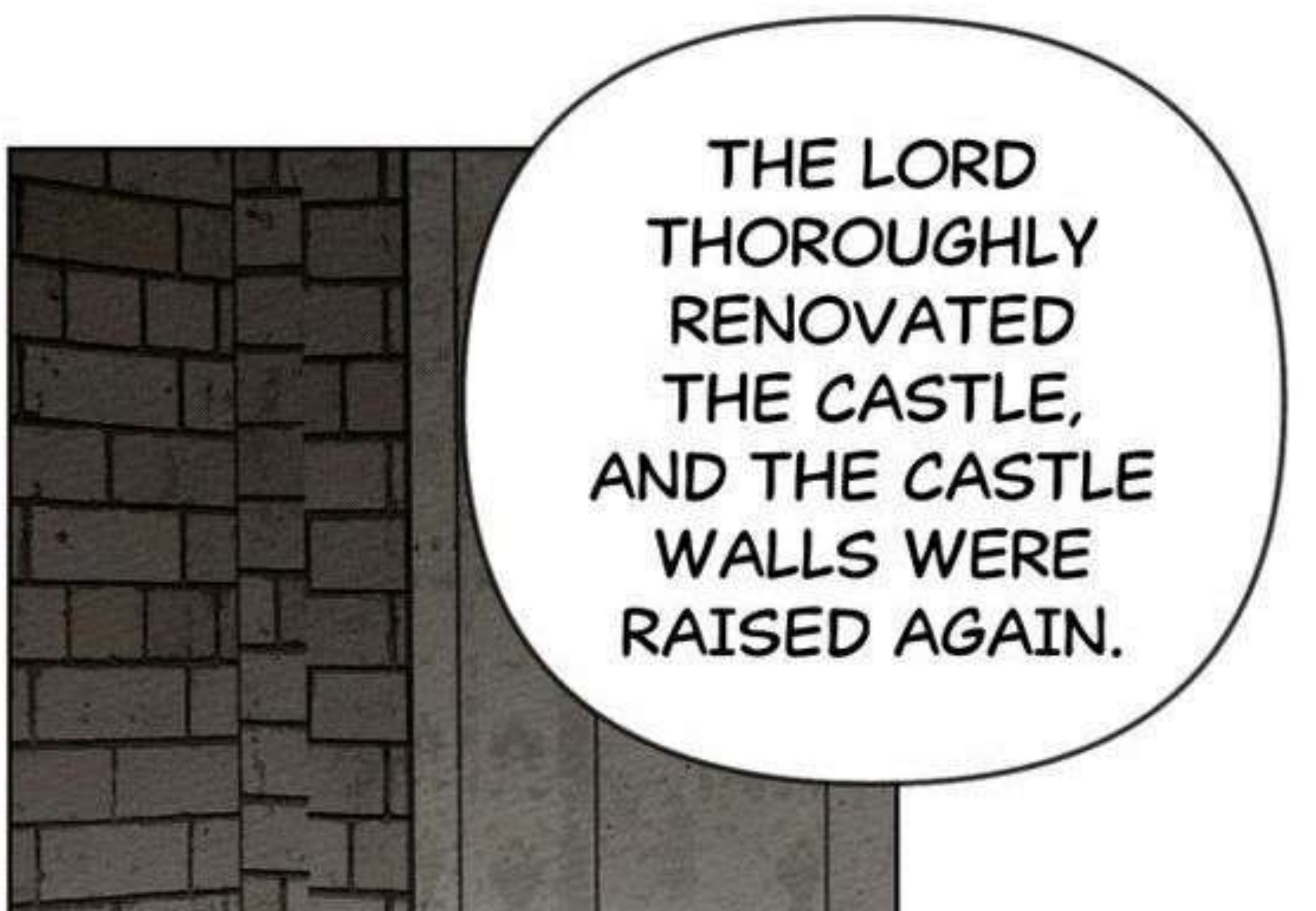

CONDITION?
AH. INDEED, THE LORD HAS MADE IT CLEAR I AM TO ASSIST YOU ANY WAY I CAN, MY LADY.
I WAS PLANNING ON CALLING THE MERCHANT TO THE CASTLE SOON,
BUT WOULD YOU LIKE TO TAKE A LOOK AROUND THE CASTLE FIRST?


WHAT A RELIEF.
SIGH..

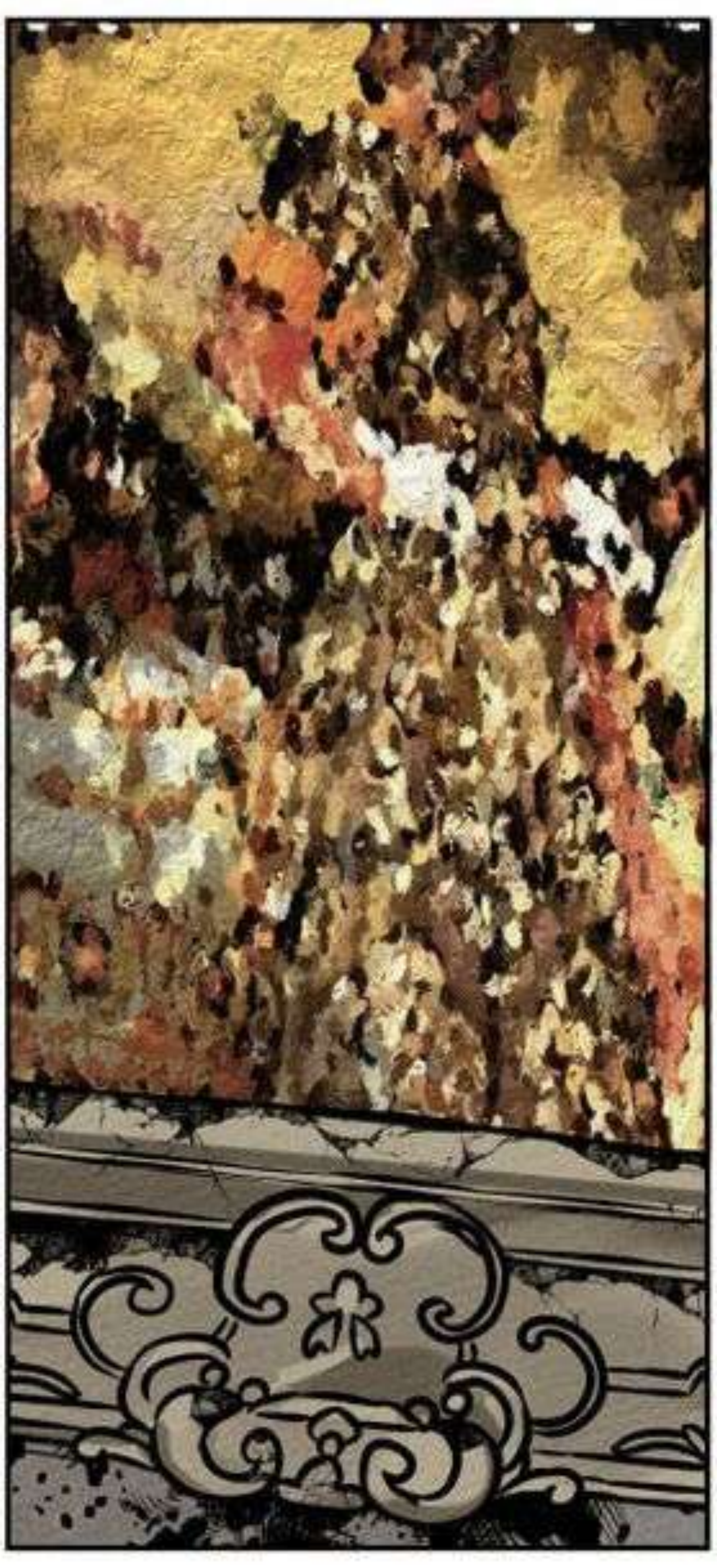

Y-YES... I-I WOULD.
HE SEEMS NICE.

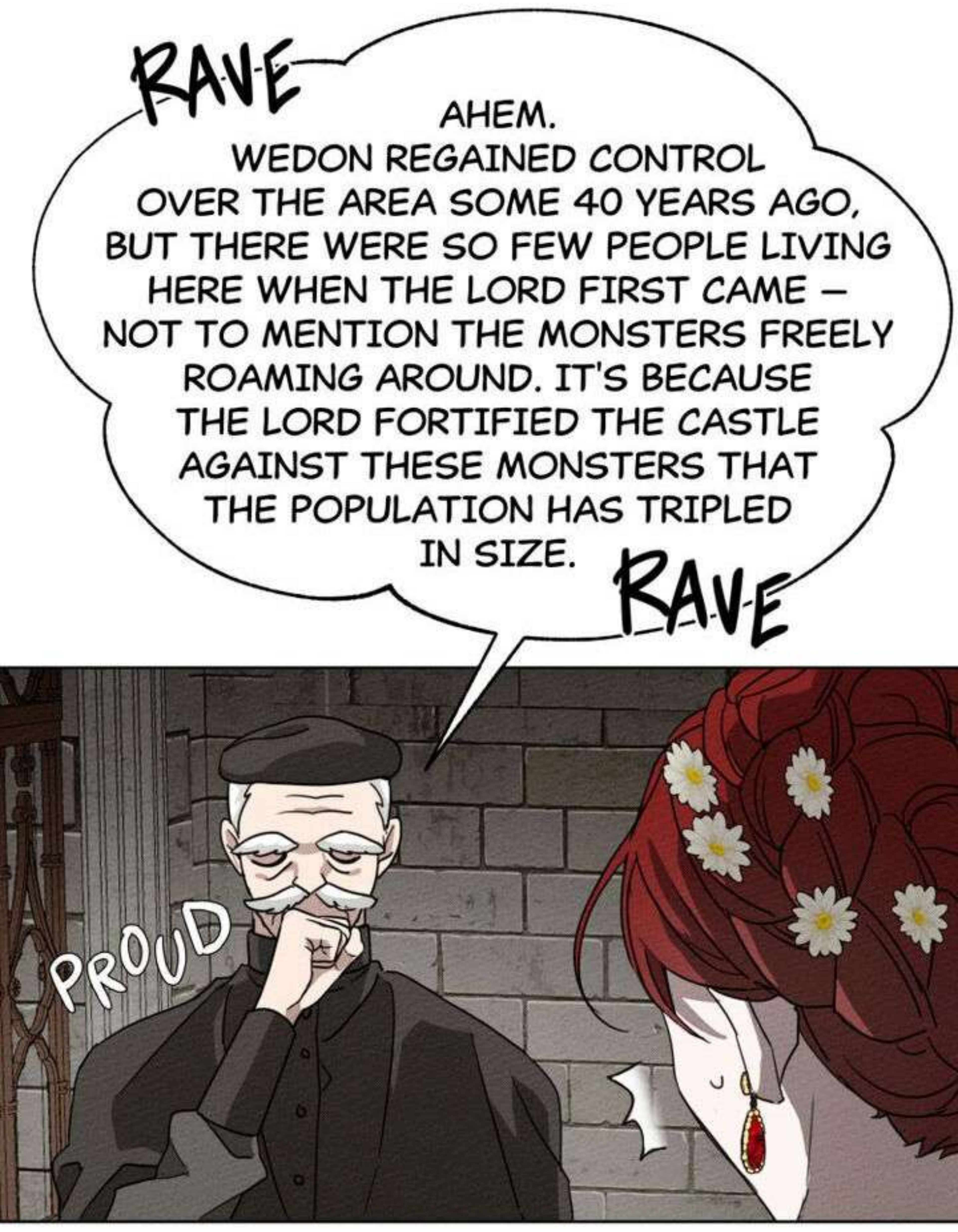

THE CALYPSE CASTLE WAS BUILT 150 YEARS AGO BY SIR ANATOL, A KNIGHT OF THE NOW FALLEN ROEM EMPIRE.
AFTER THE EMPIRE FELL, MONSTER ATTACKS BECAME MORE FREQUENT IN THIS AREA,
AND THE SEVEN KINGDOMS GRADUALLY LOST CONTROL OF THE REGION.

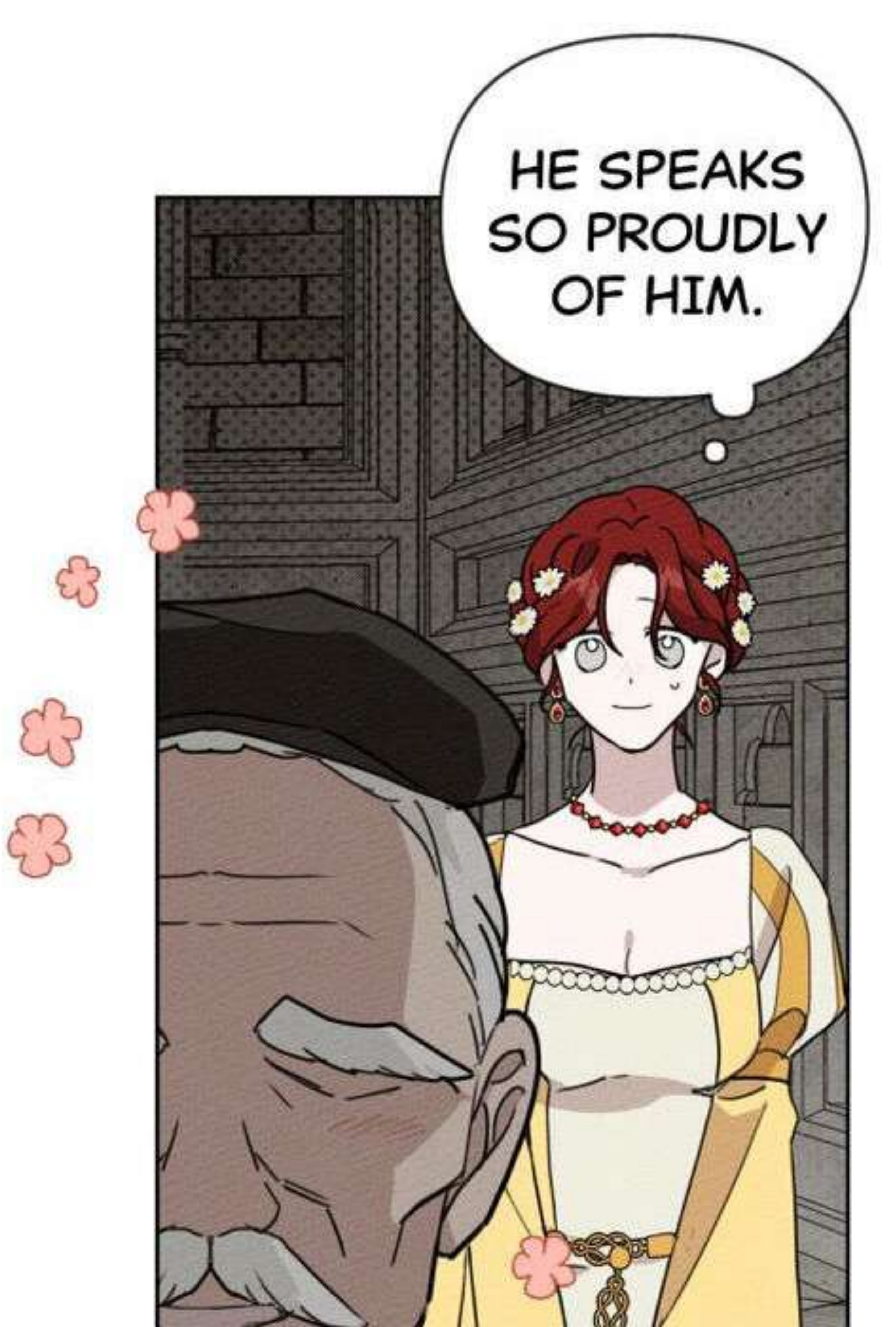
BUT 10 YEARS AGO, LORD RIFTAN, AGED 18 AT THE TIME AND NEWLY KNIGHTED,
BECAME THE NEW LIEGE OF ANATOL.

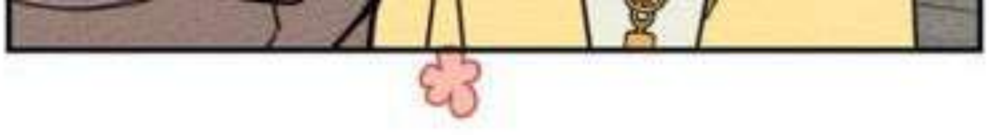

THE LORD THOROUGHLY RENOVATED THE CASTLE, AND THE CASTLE WALLS WERE RAISED AGAIN.

...

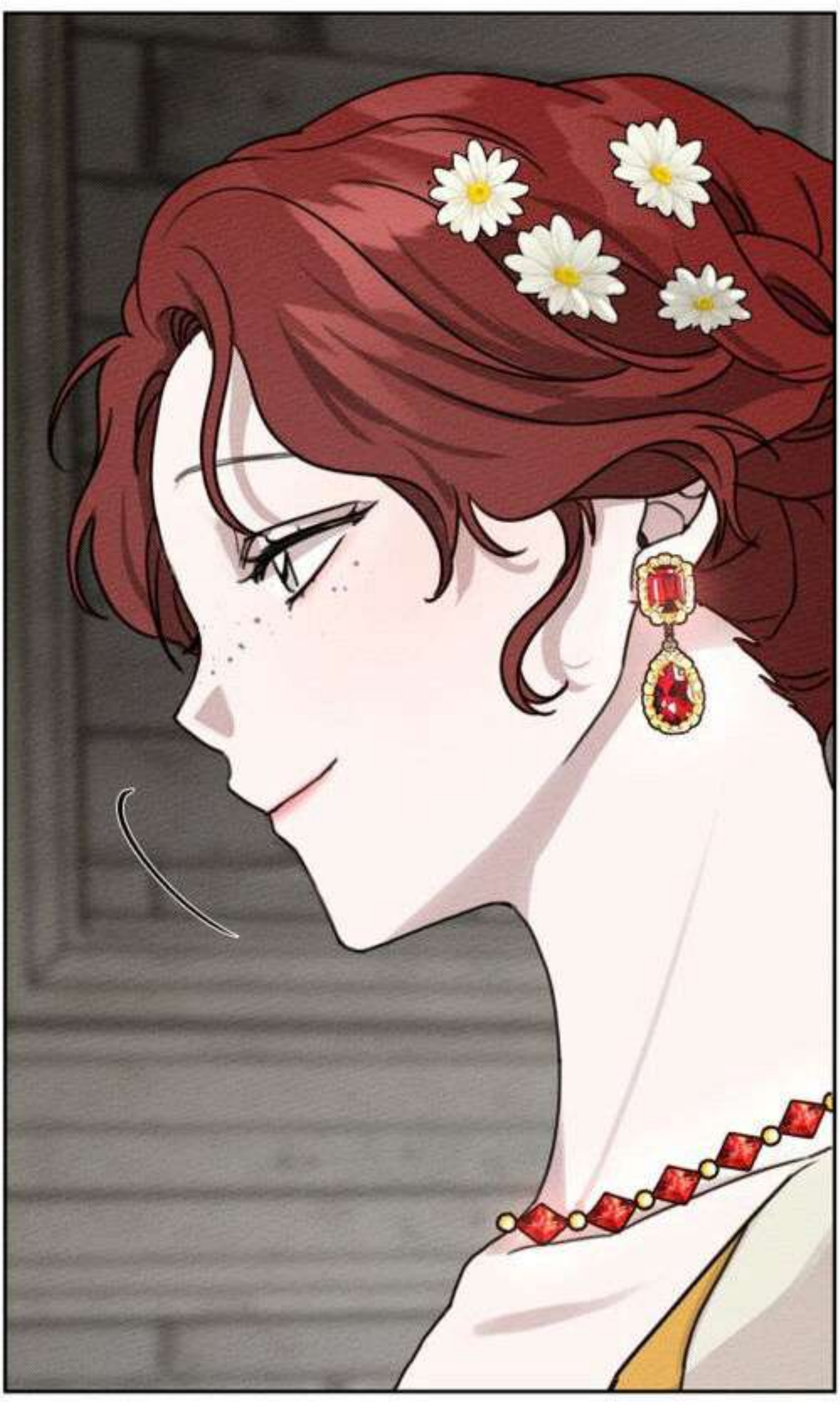



RAVE
AHEM. WEDON REGAINED CONTROL OVER THE AREA SOME 40 YEARS AGO, BUT THERE WERE SO FEW PEOPLE LIVING HERE WHEN THE LORD FIRST CAME – NOT TO MENTION THE MONSTERS FREELY ROAMING AROUND. IT'S BECAUSE THE LORD FORTIFIED THE CASTLE AGAINST THESE MONSTERS THAT THE POPULATION HAS TRIPLED IN SIZE.
RAVE
PROUD

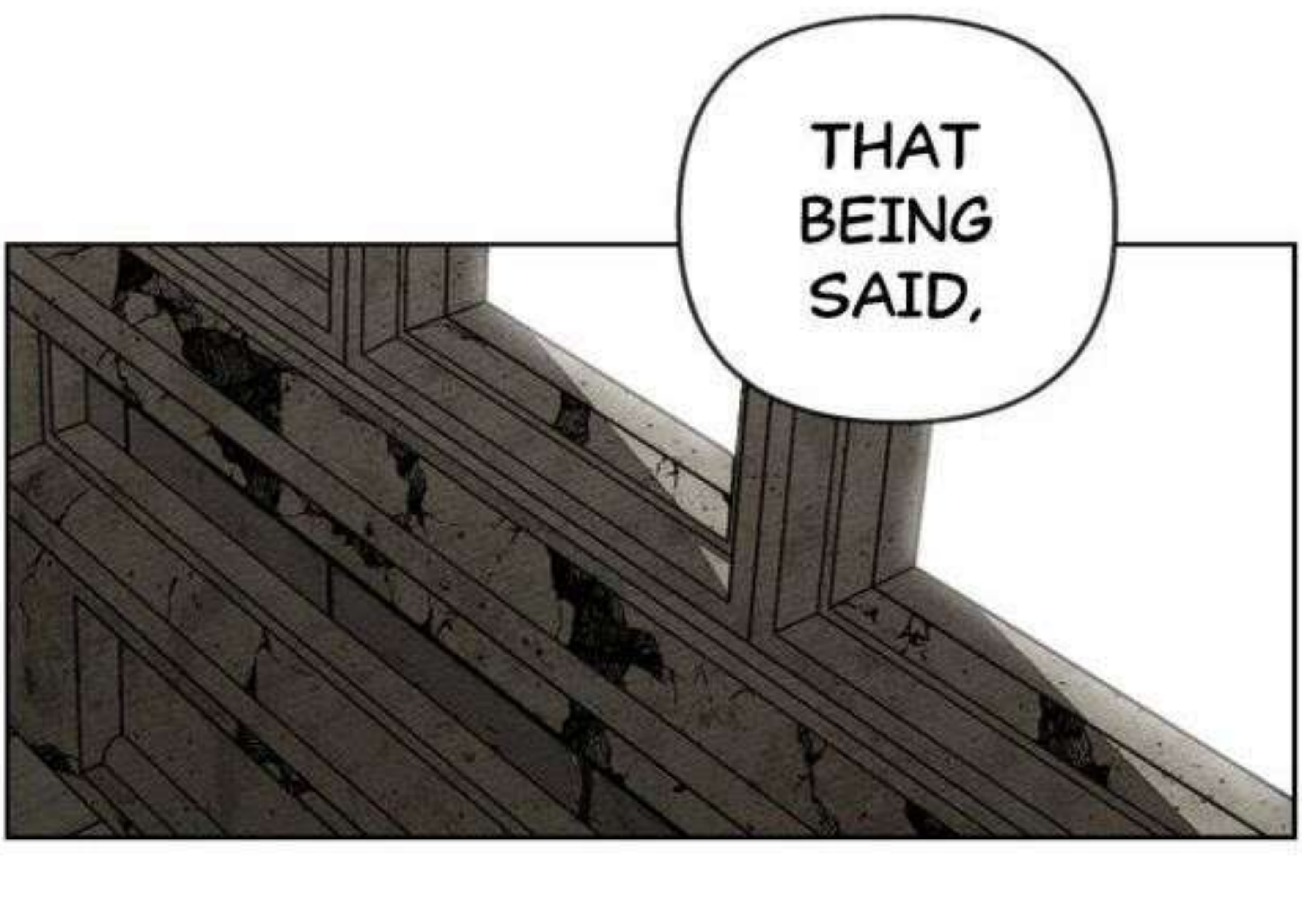

HE SPEAKS SO PROUDLY OF HIM.



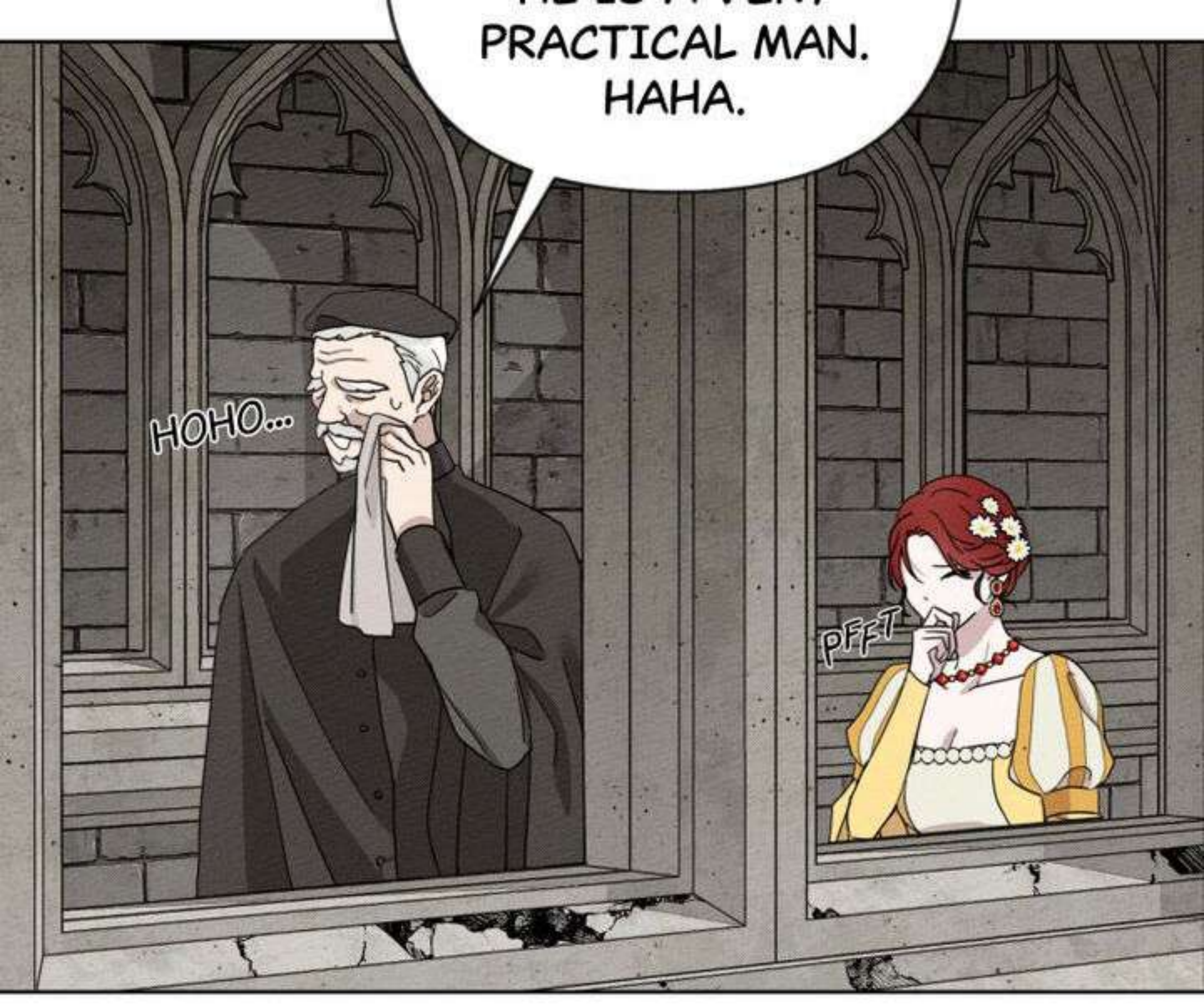
RIFTAN IS A RESPECTED LORD.

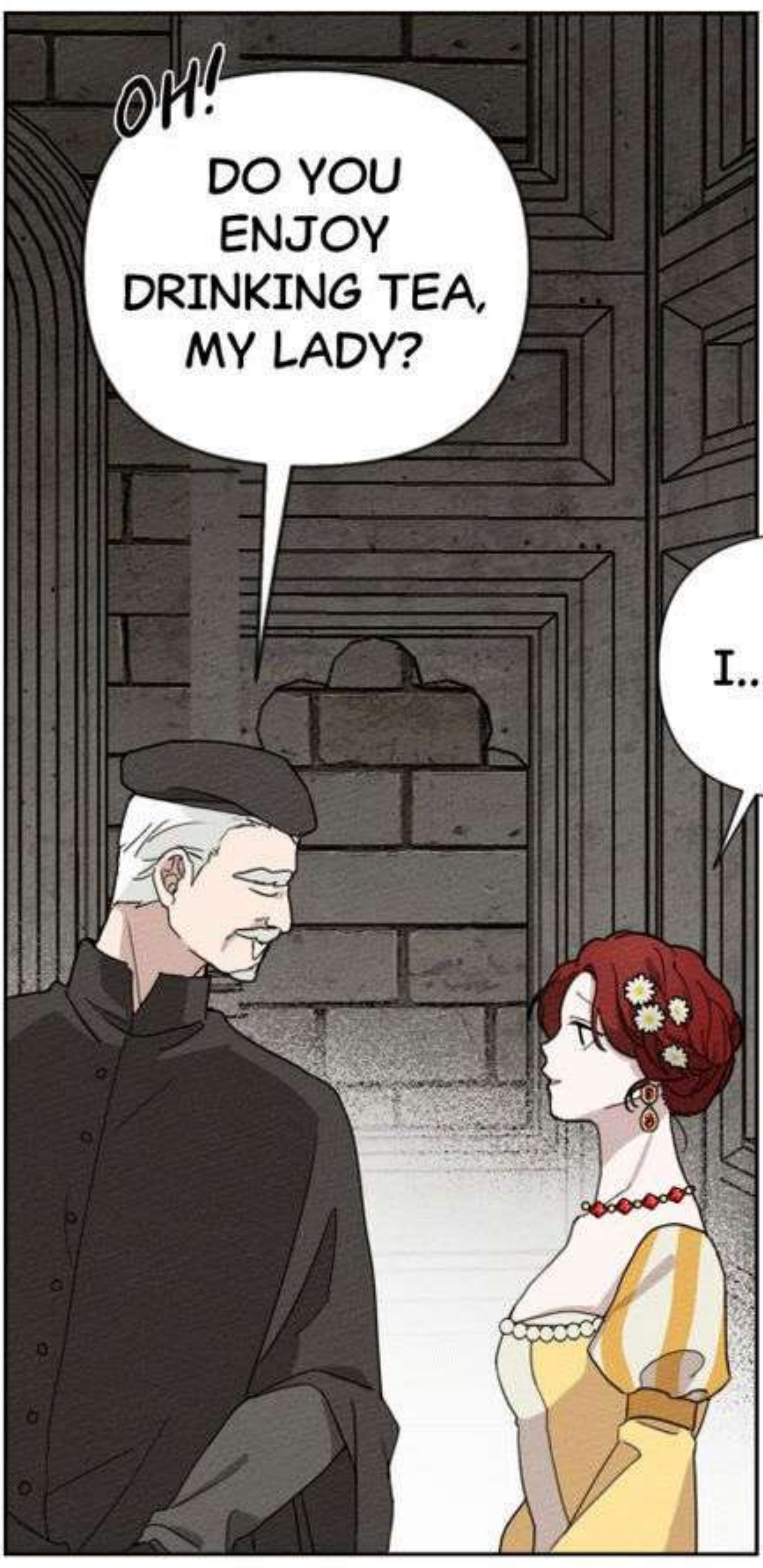


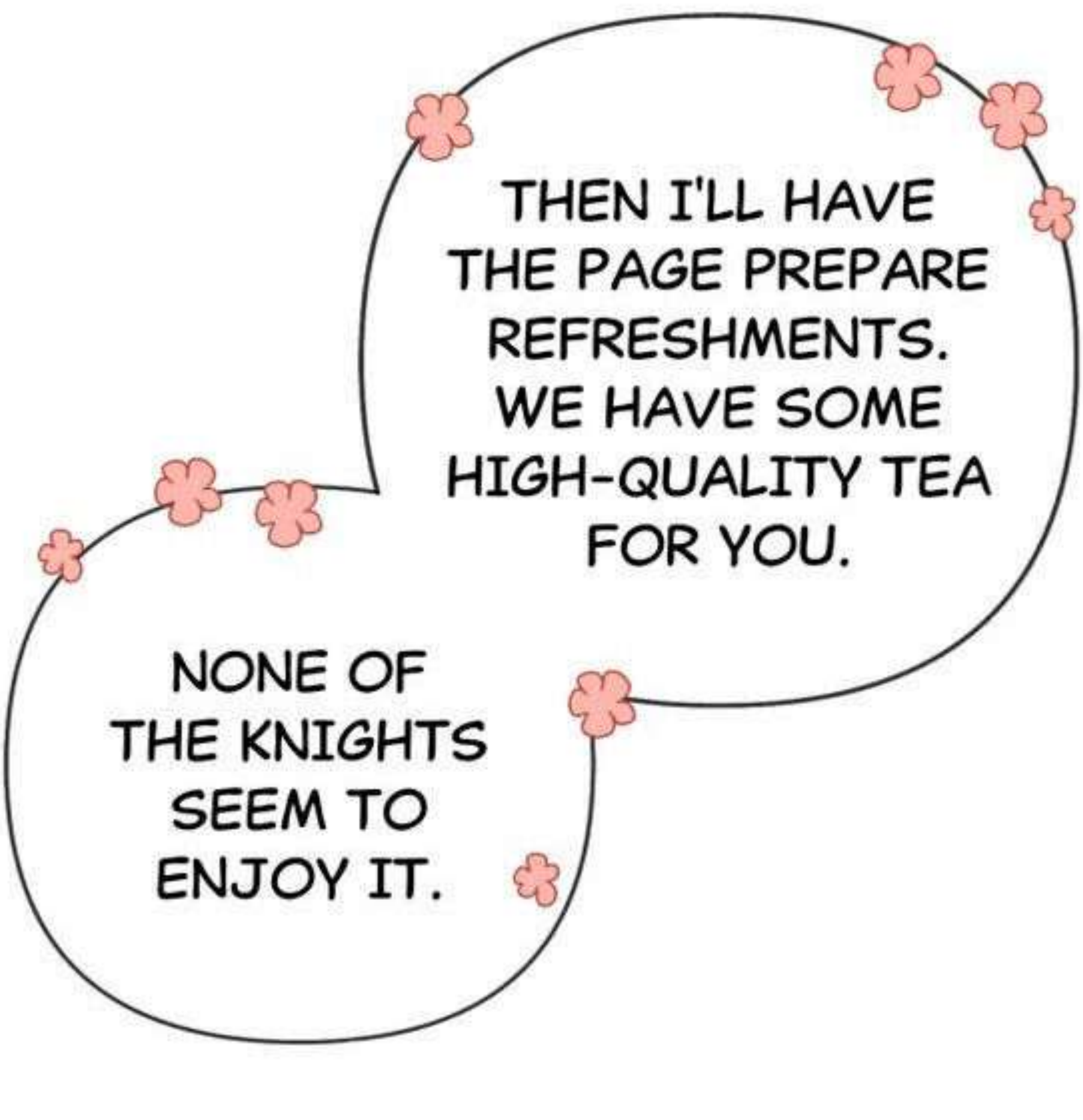
THE SERVANTS OF THE CROYSO CASTLE ONLY EVER COWERED IN FEAR AT MY FATHER...

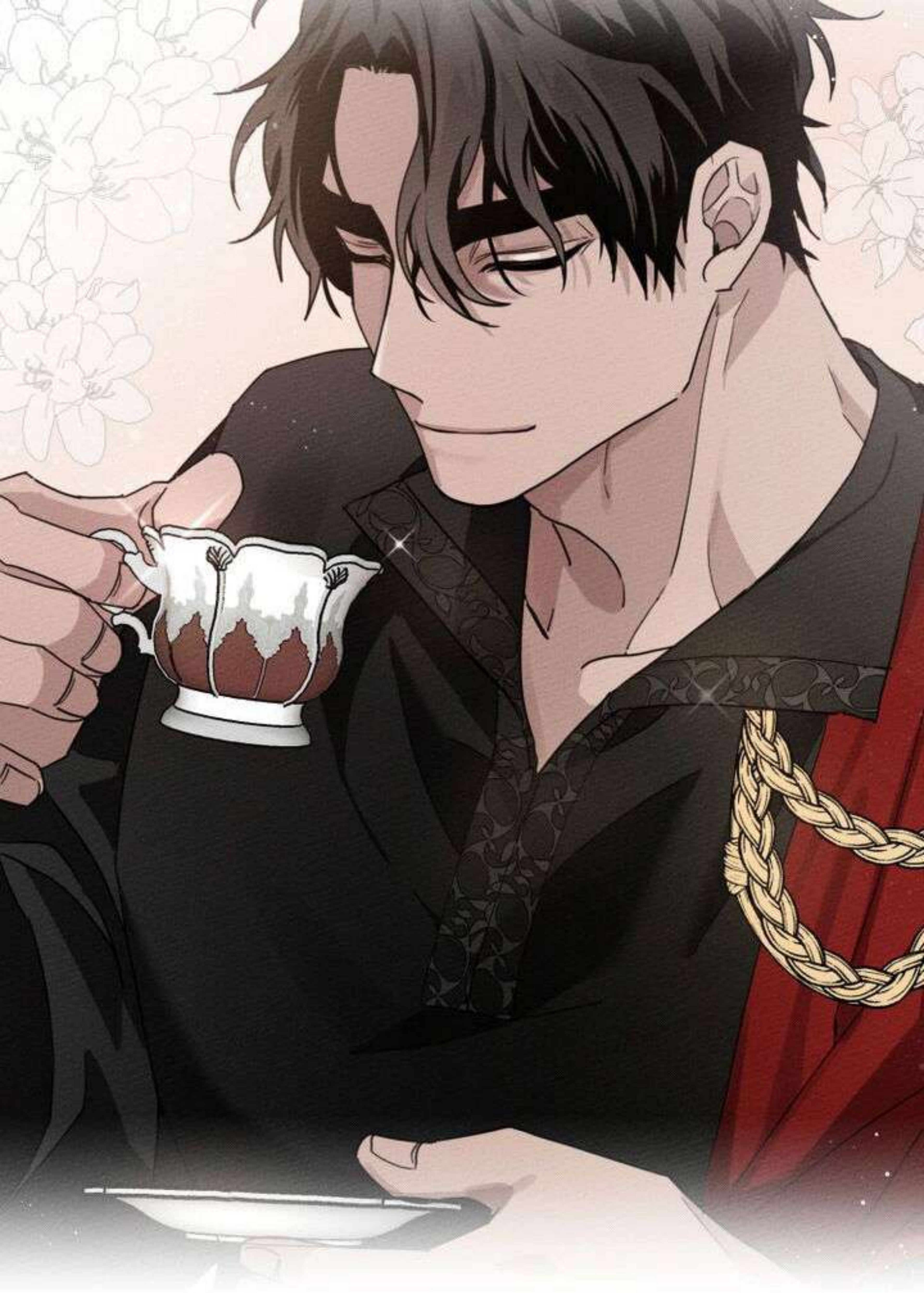


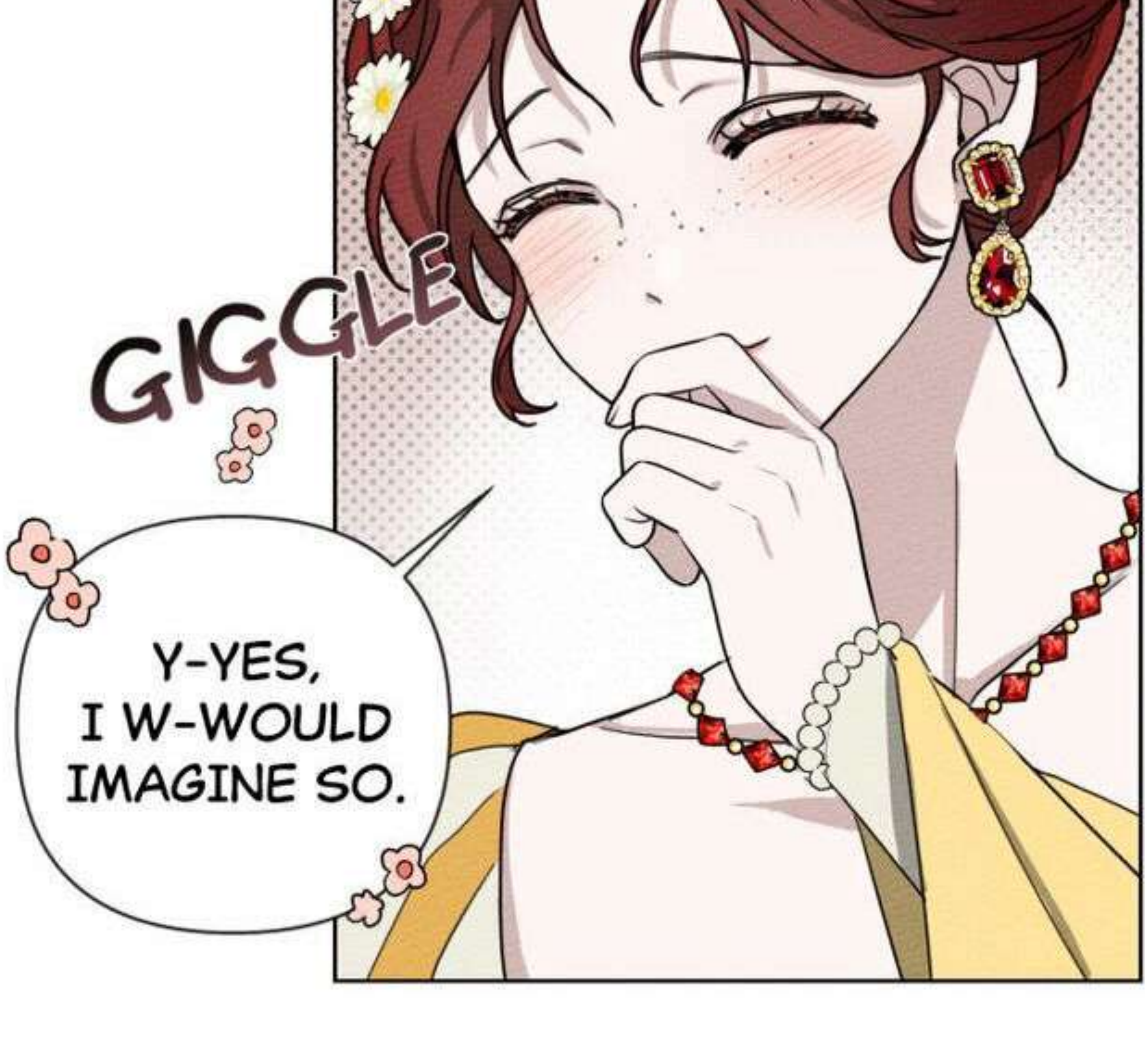
THE CASTLE IS INDEED QUITE STARK BECAUSE HE IS A VERY

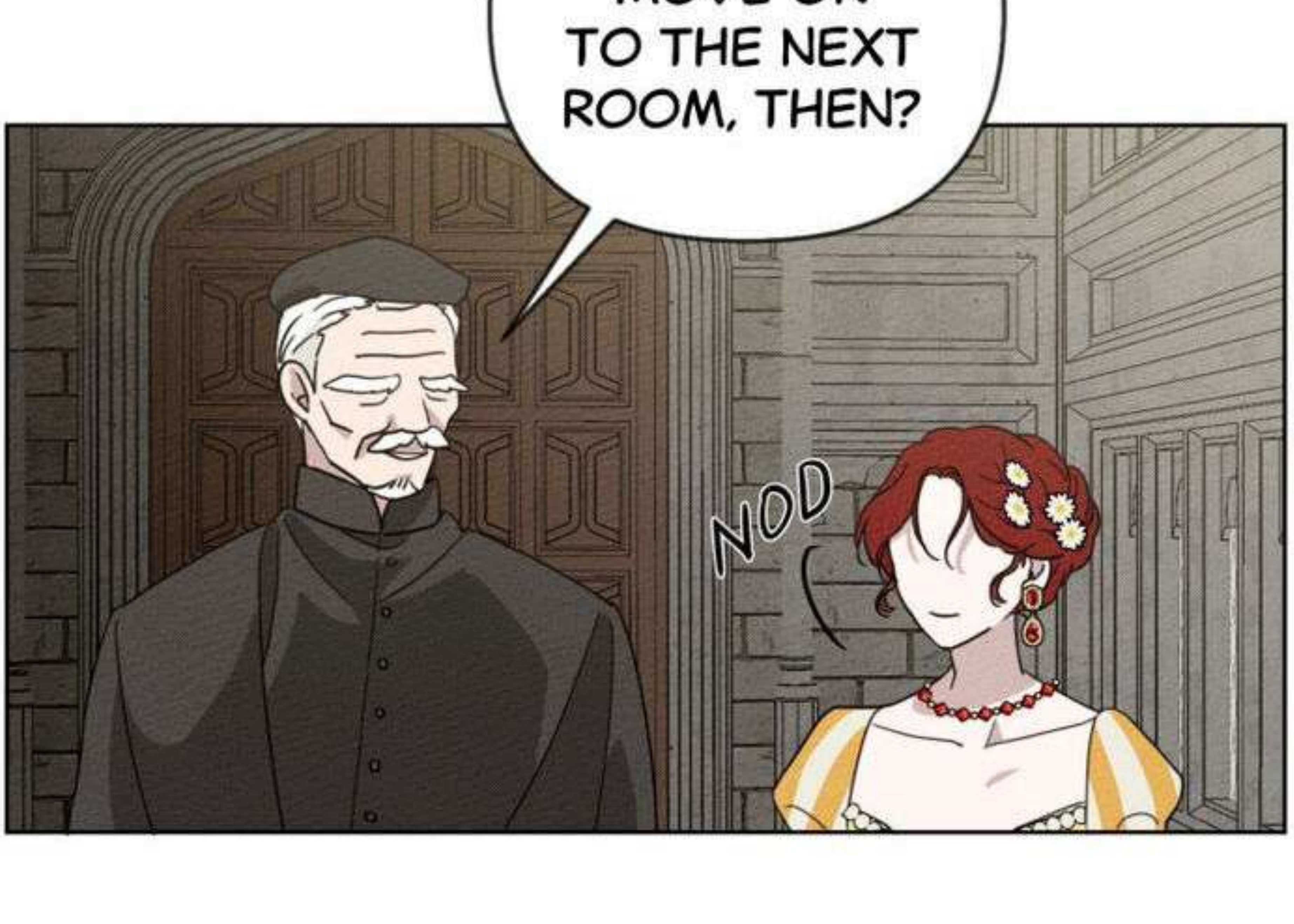

PRACTICAL MAN.
HAHA.
HOHO...
PFFT

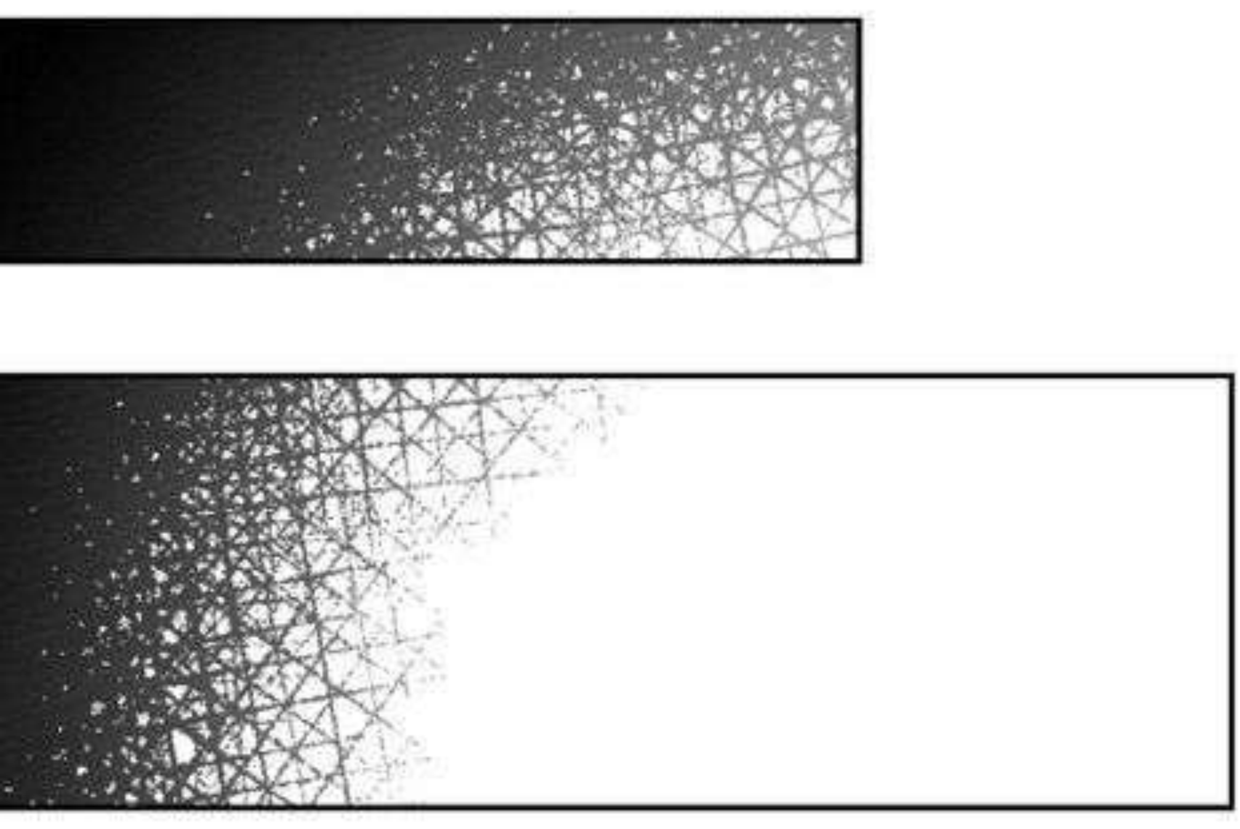

OH!
DO YOU ENJOY DRINKING TEA, MY LADY?
I... I DO.

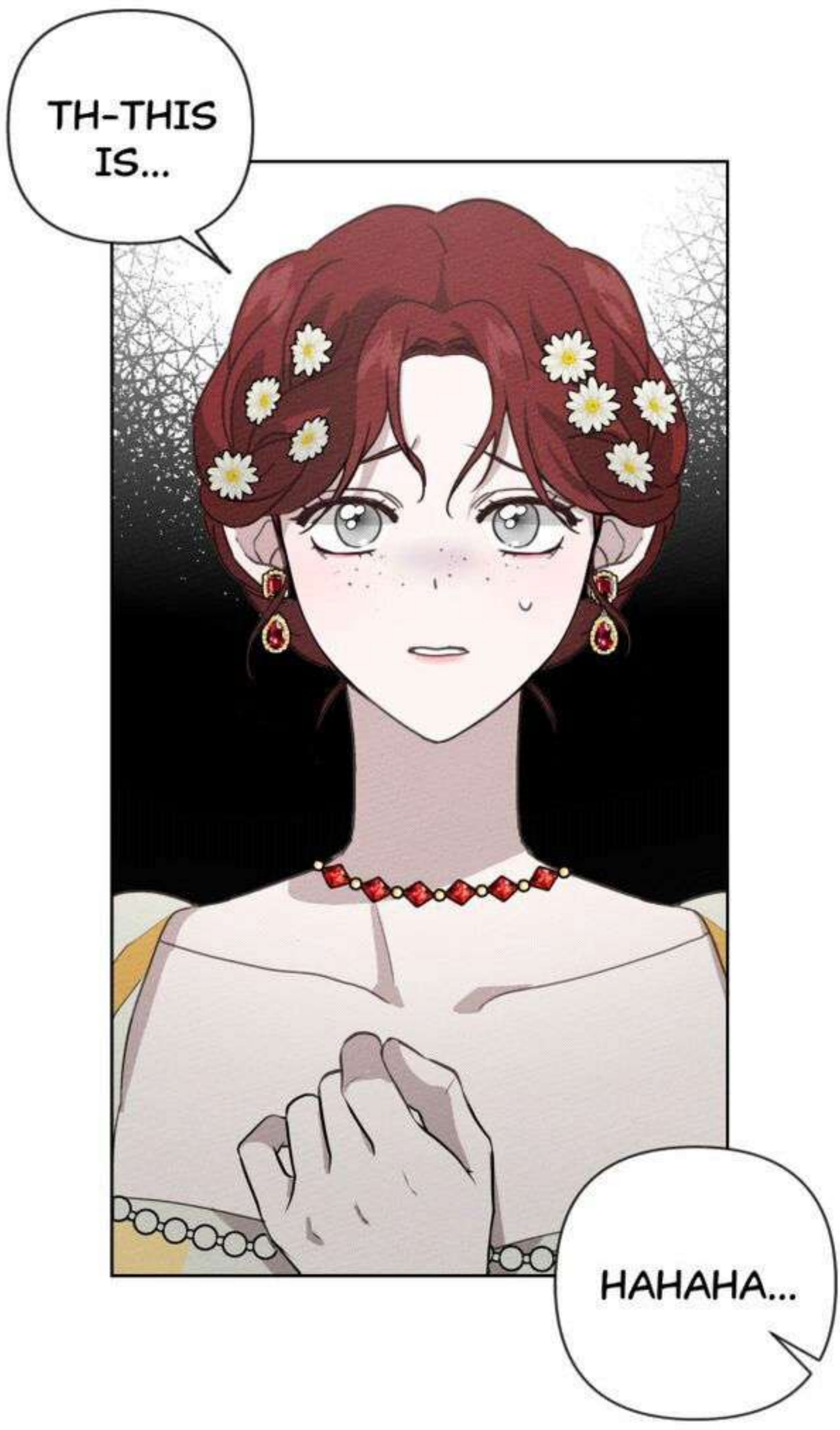

THEN I'LL HAVE THE PAGE PREPARE REFRESHMENTS. WE HAVE SOME HIGH-QUALITY TEA FOR YOU.
NONE OF THE KNIGHTS SEEM TO ENJOY IT.

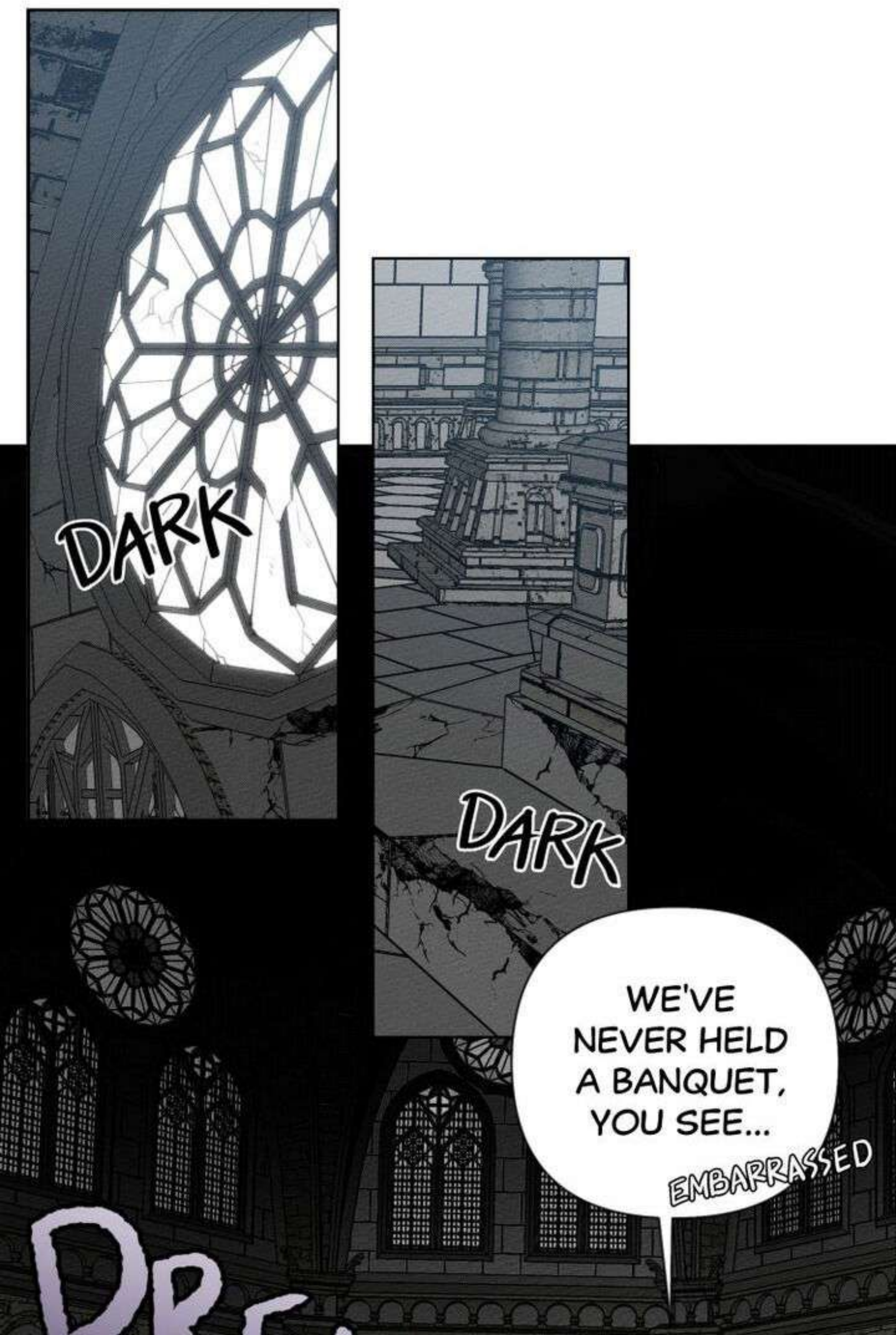



GIGGLE
Y-YES, I W-WOULD IMAGINE SO.


SHALL WE MOVE ON TO THE NEXT ROOM, THEN?
NOD

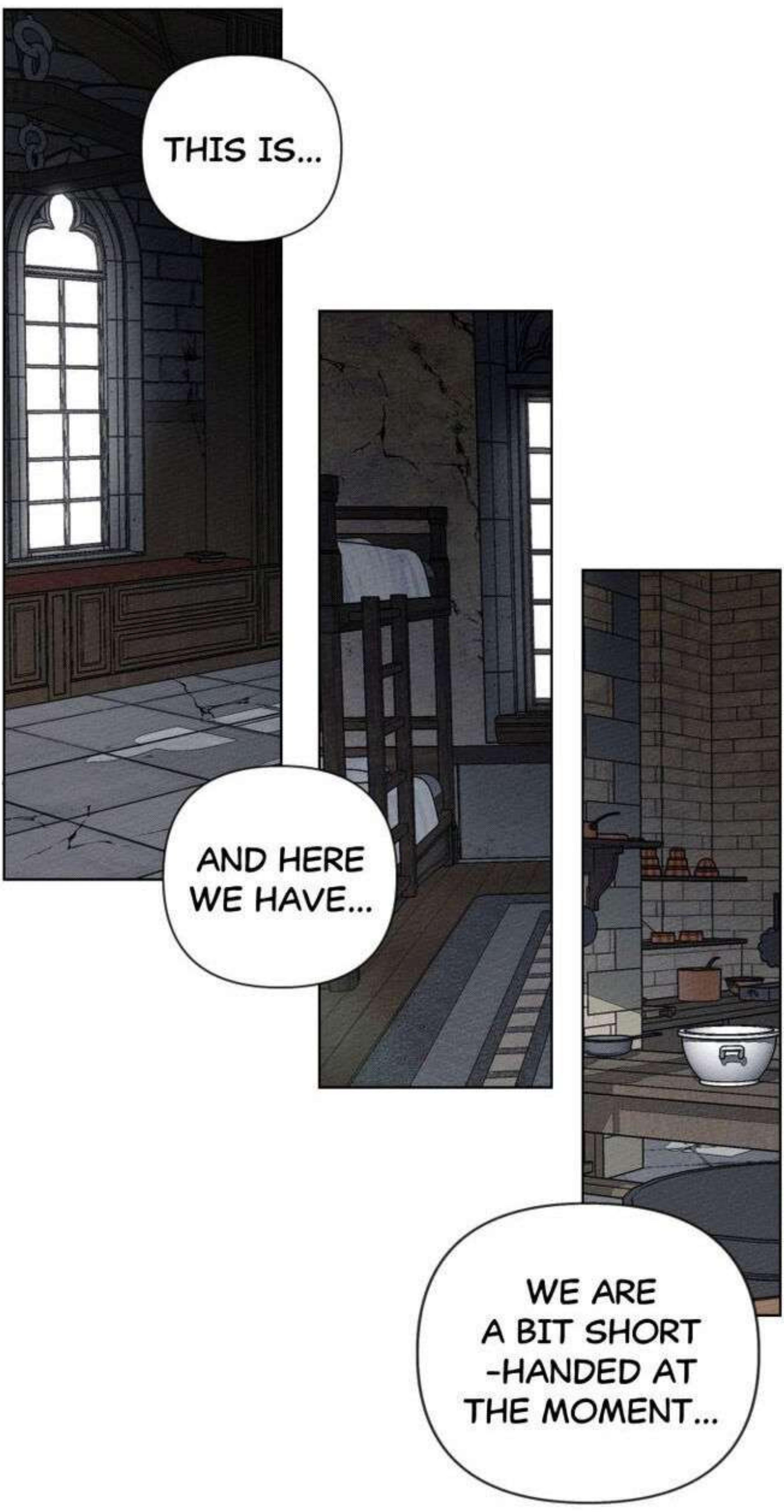


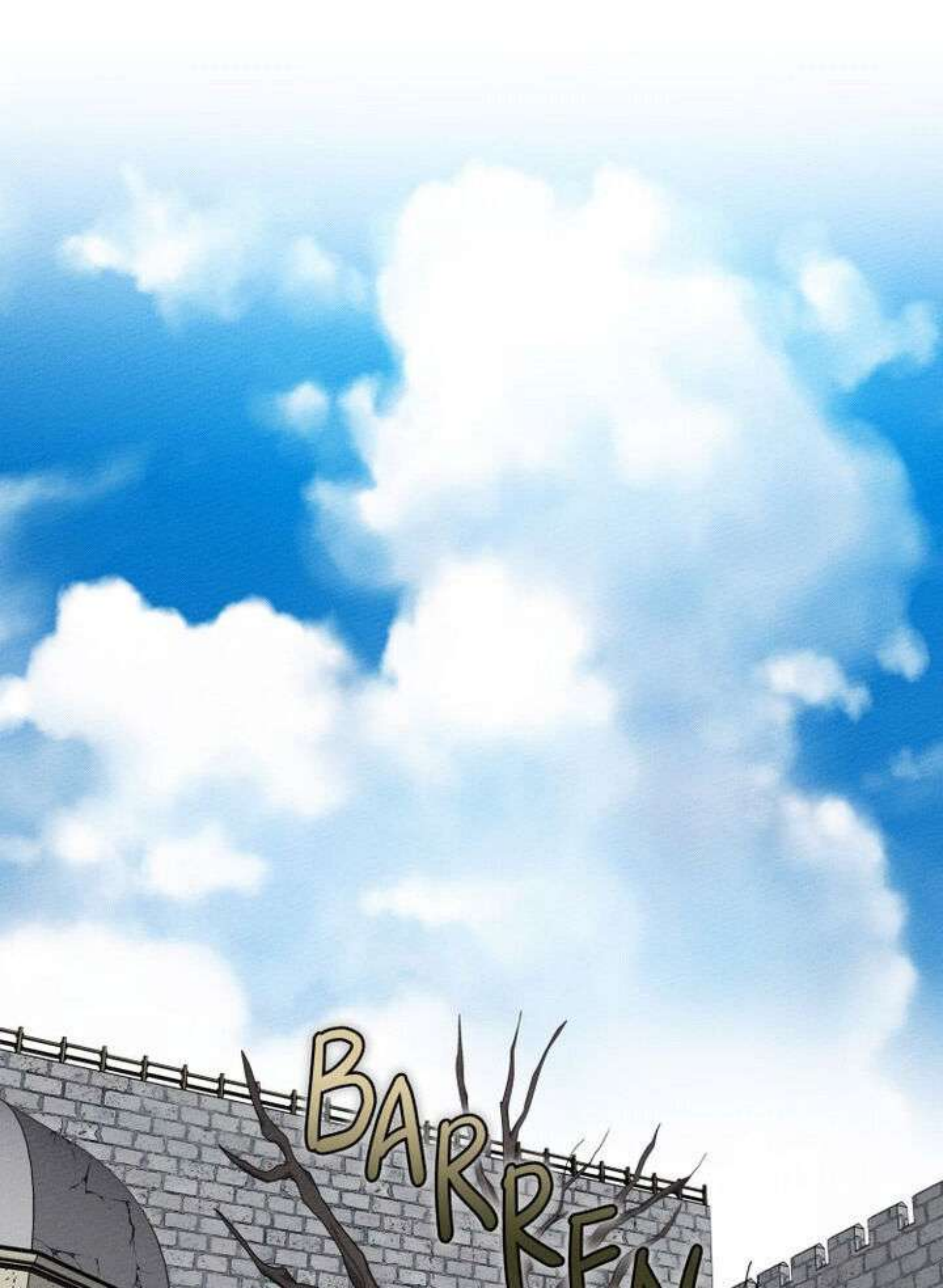

TH-THIS IS...
HAHAHA...

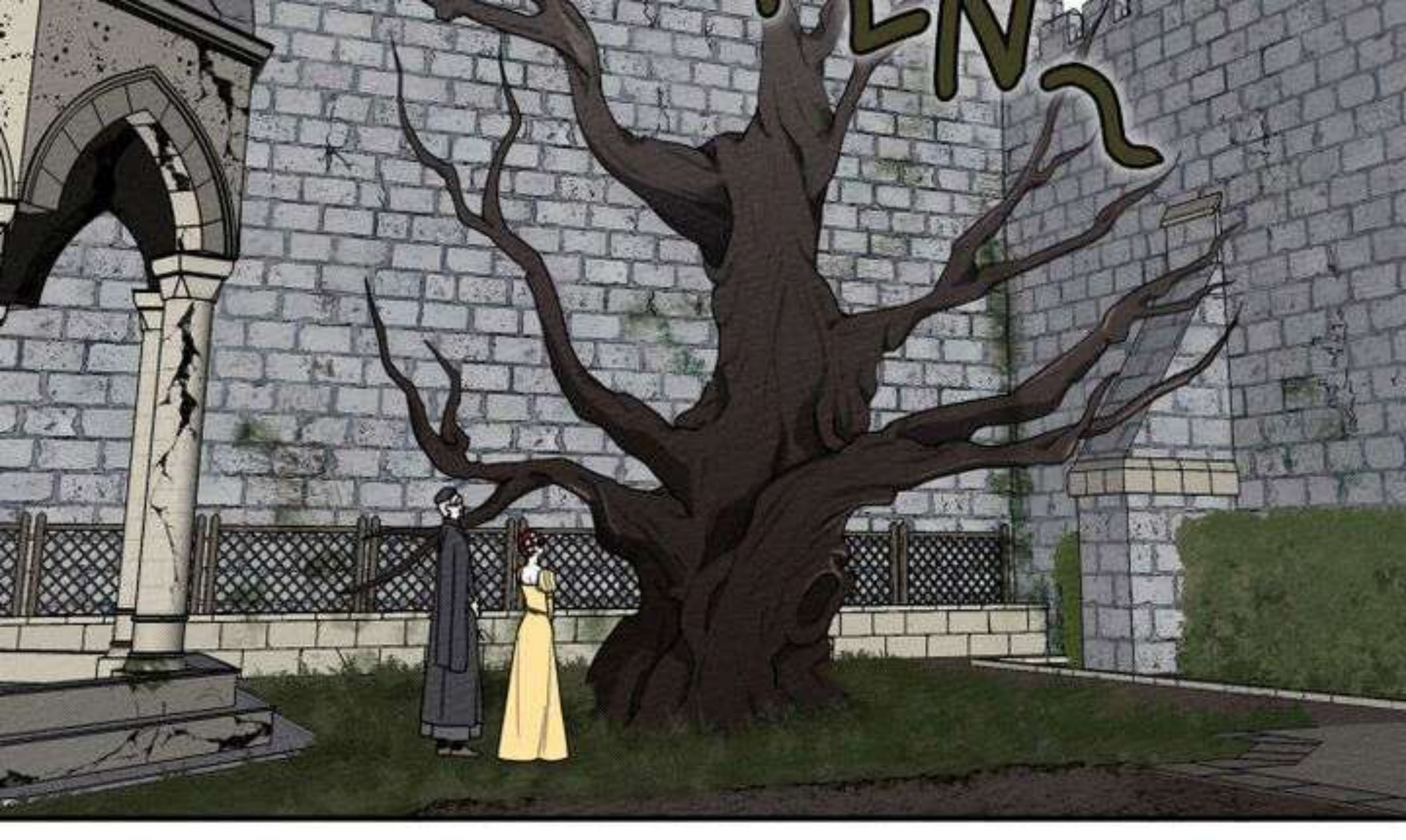

DARK
DARK
WE'VE NEVER HELD A BANQUET, YOU SEE...
EMBARRASSED

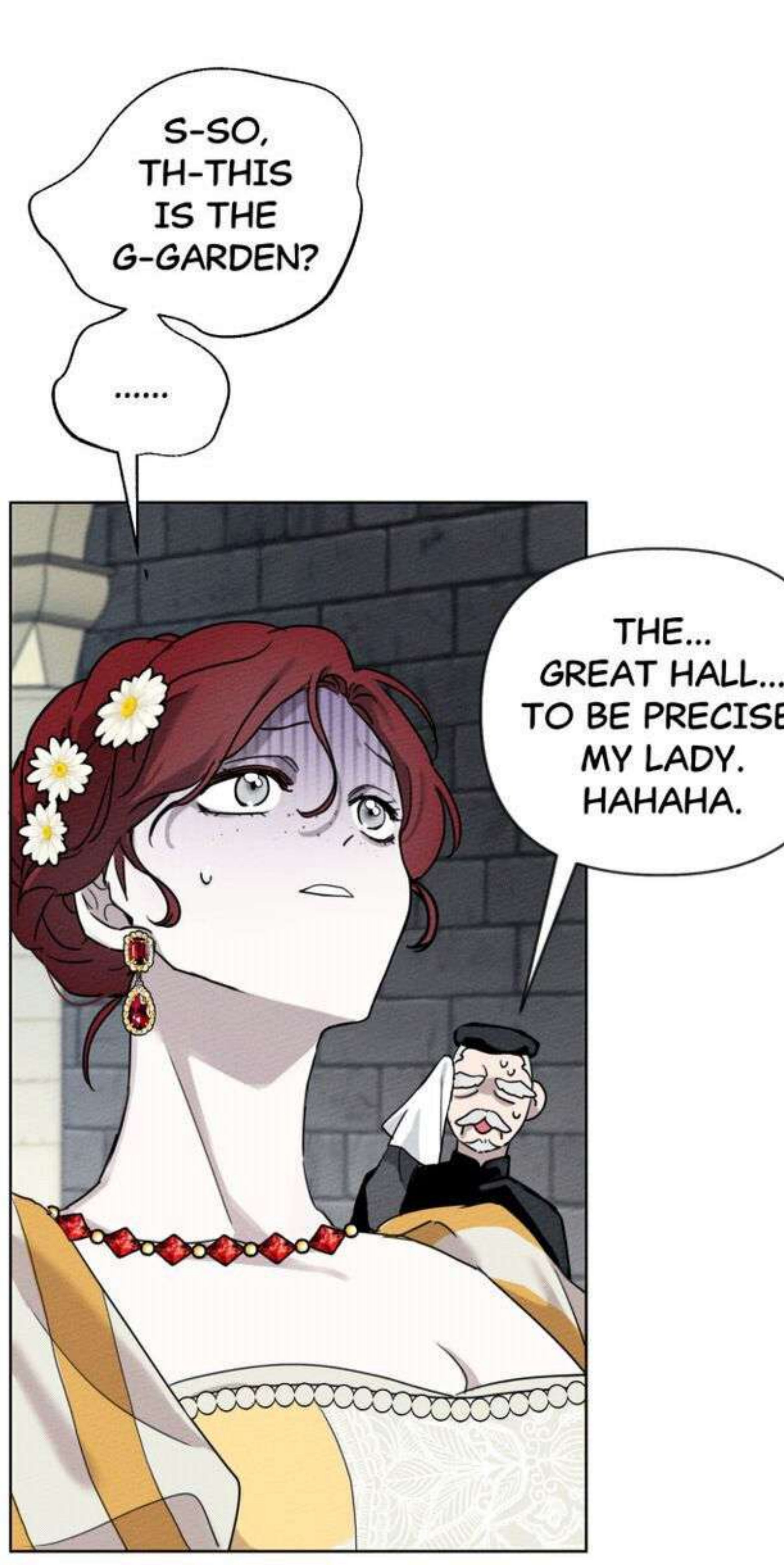
EARY..
B-BUT DON'T YOU EVER HAVE GUESTS V-VISITING...?
WELL, OUR GUESTS ARE ALL KNIGHTS. I WOULDN'T BE SURPRISED IF THE LORD HAS FORGOTTEN ABOUT THIS PLACE.
AND SINCE WE ARE MERE SERVANTS... I HOPE, MY LADY... THAT YOU WON'T GIVE UP ON US...
P-PLEASE ASK THE MERCHANTS TO C-COME AS SOON AS P-POSSIBLE.

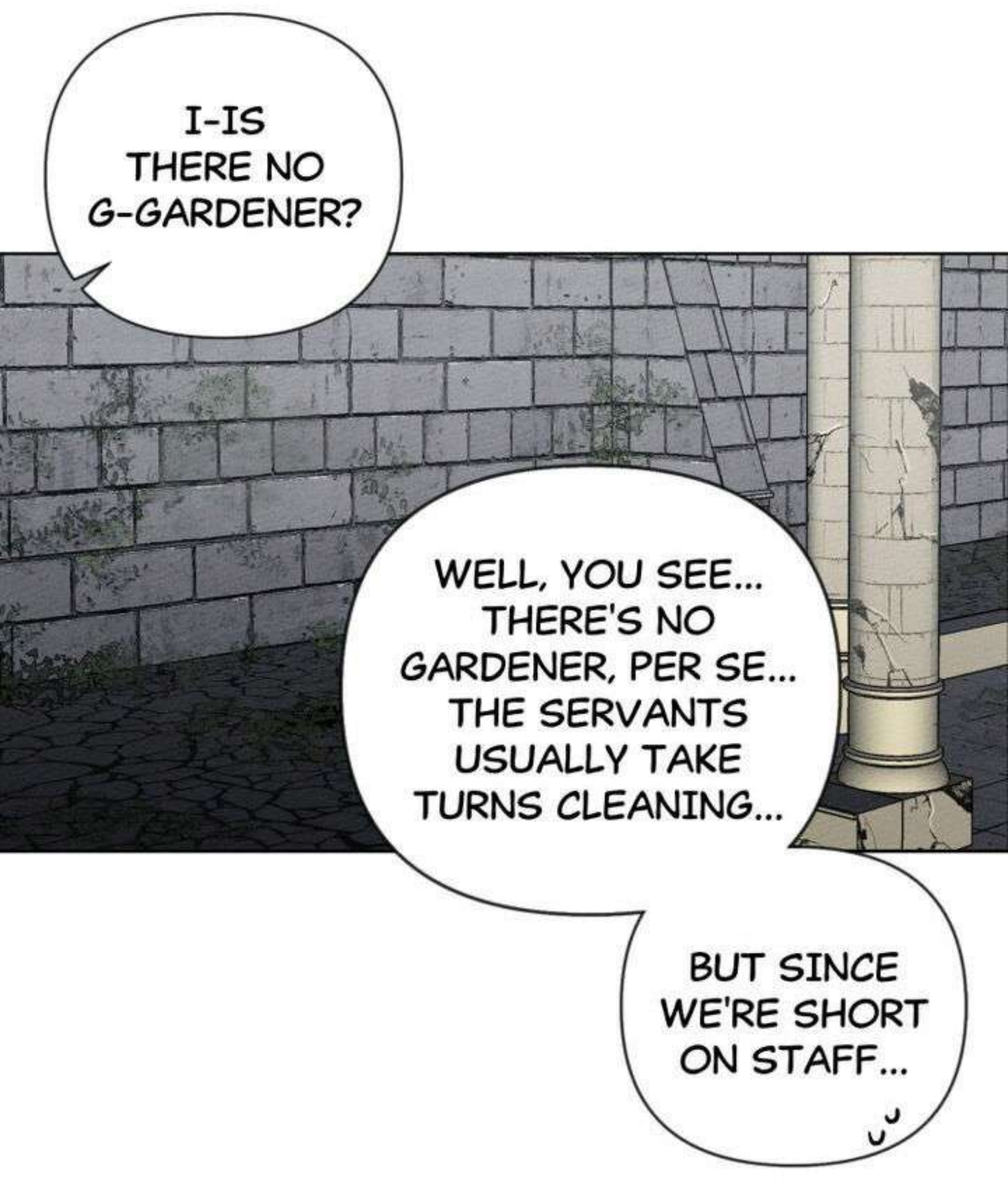
AS YOU WISH, MY LADY.

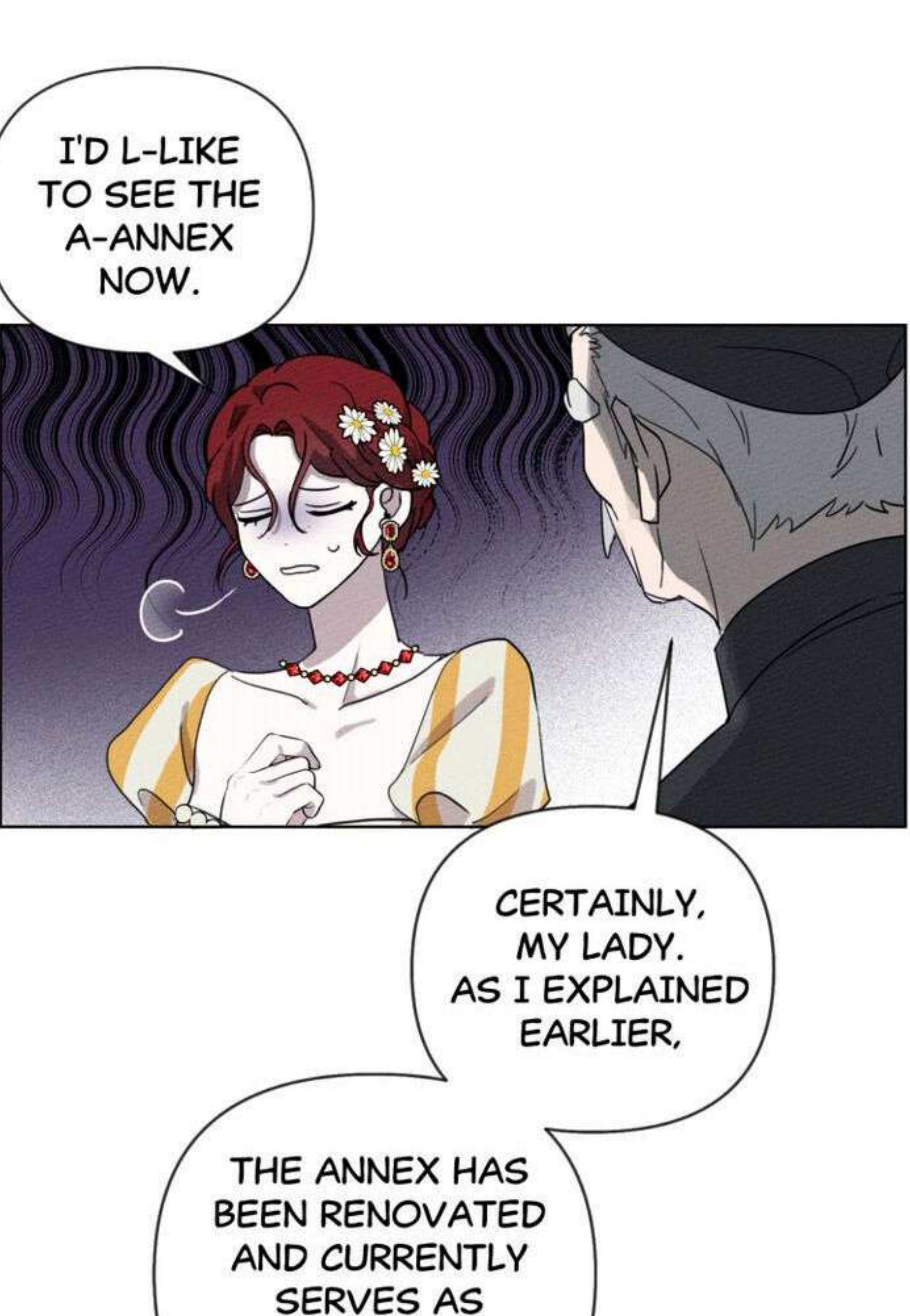

THIS IS...
AND HERE WE HAVE...
WE ARE A BIT SHORT -HANDED AT THE MOMENT...

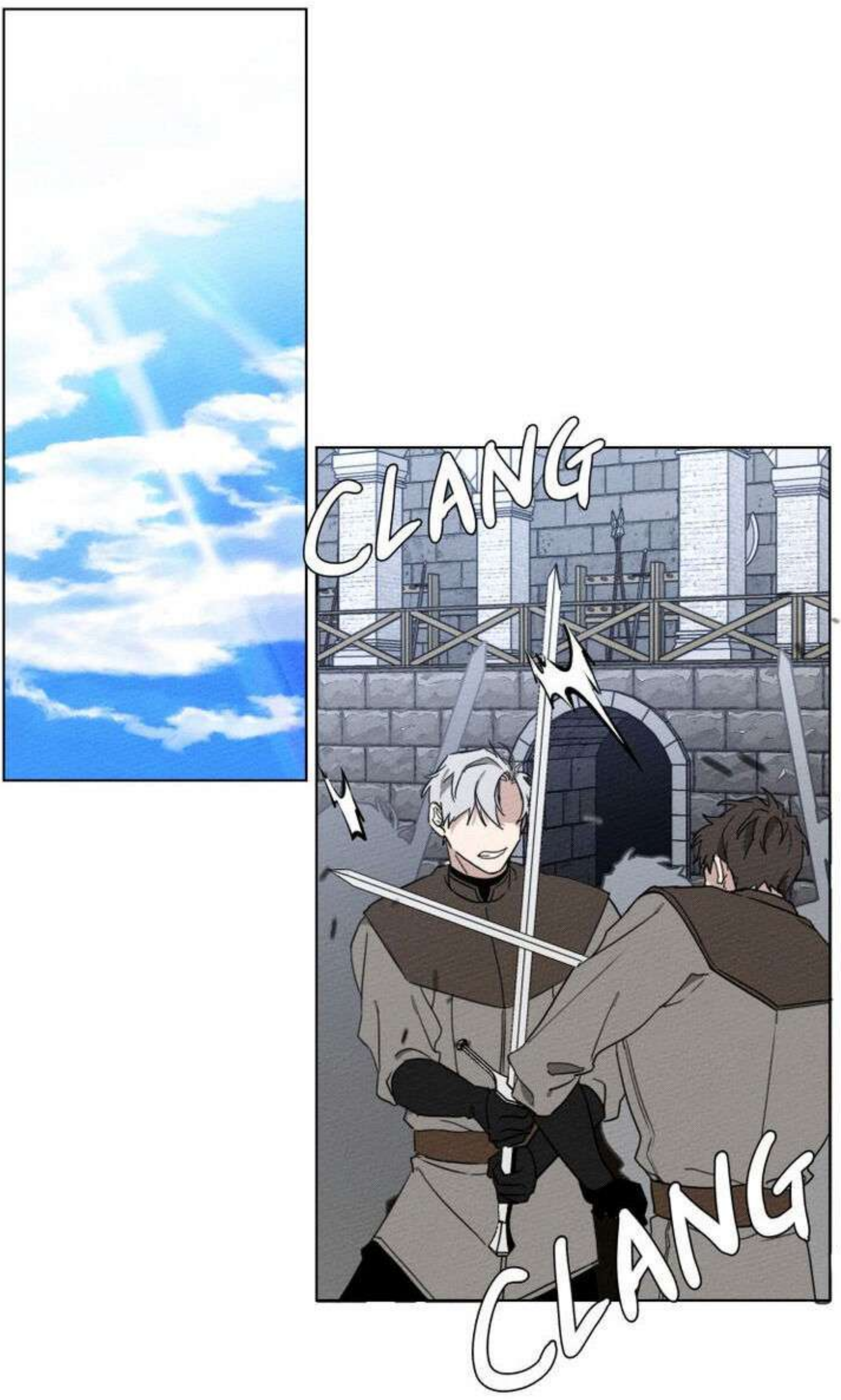

BARREN

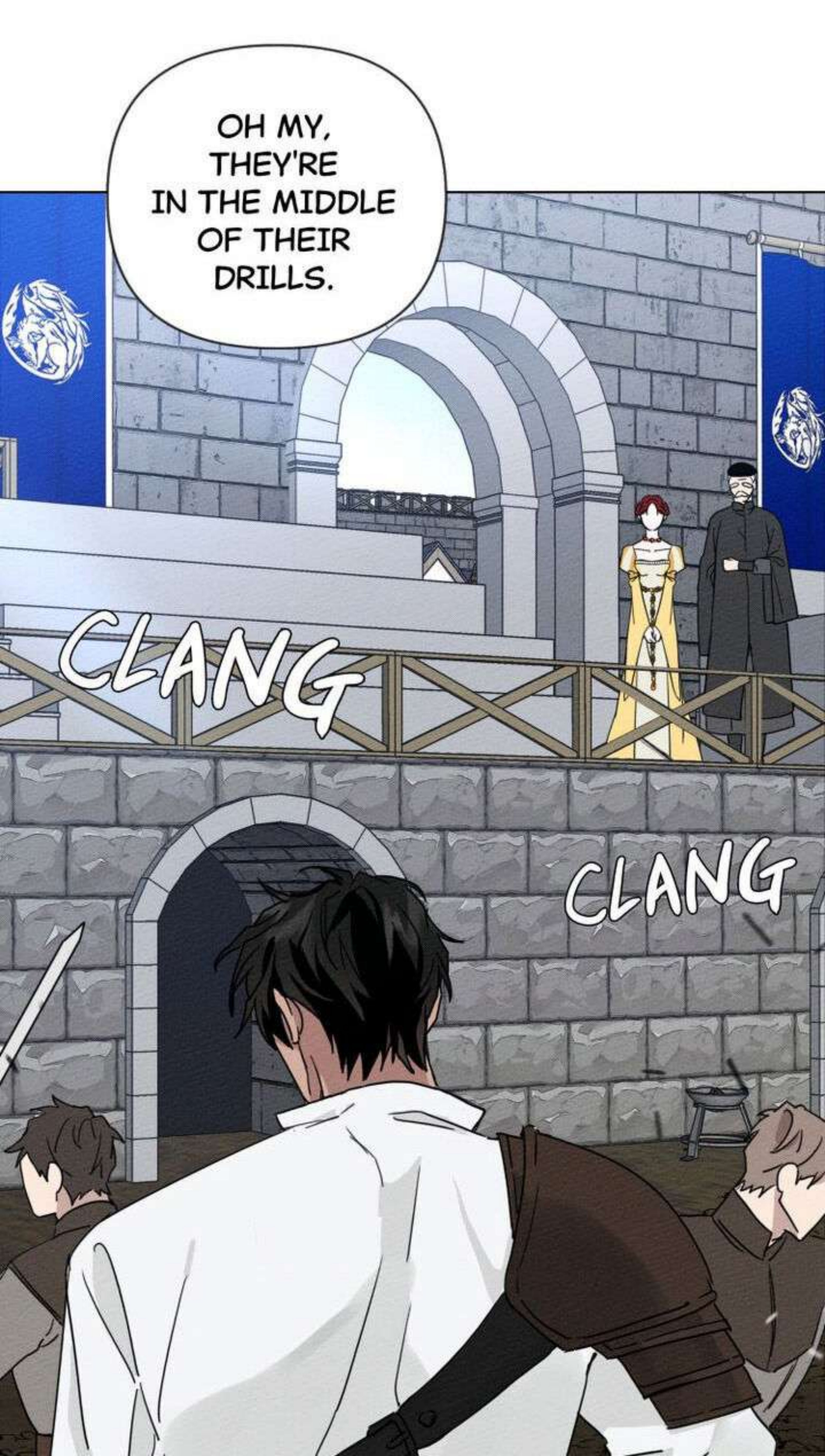


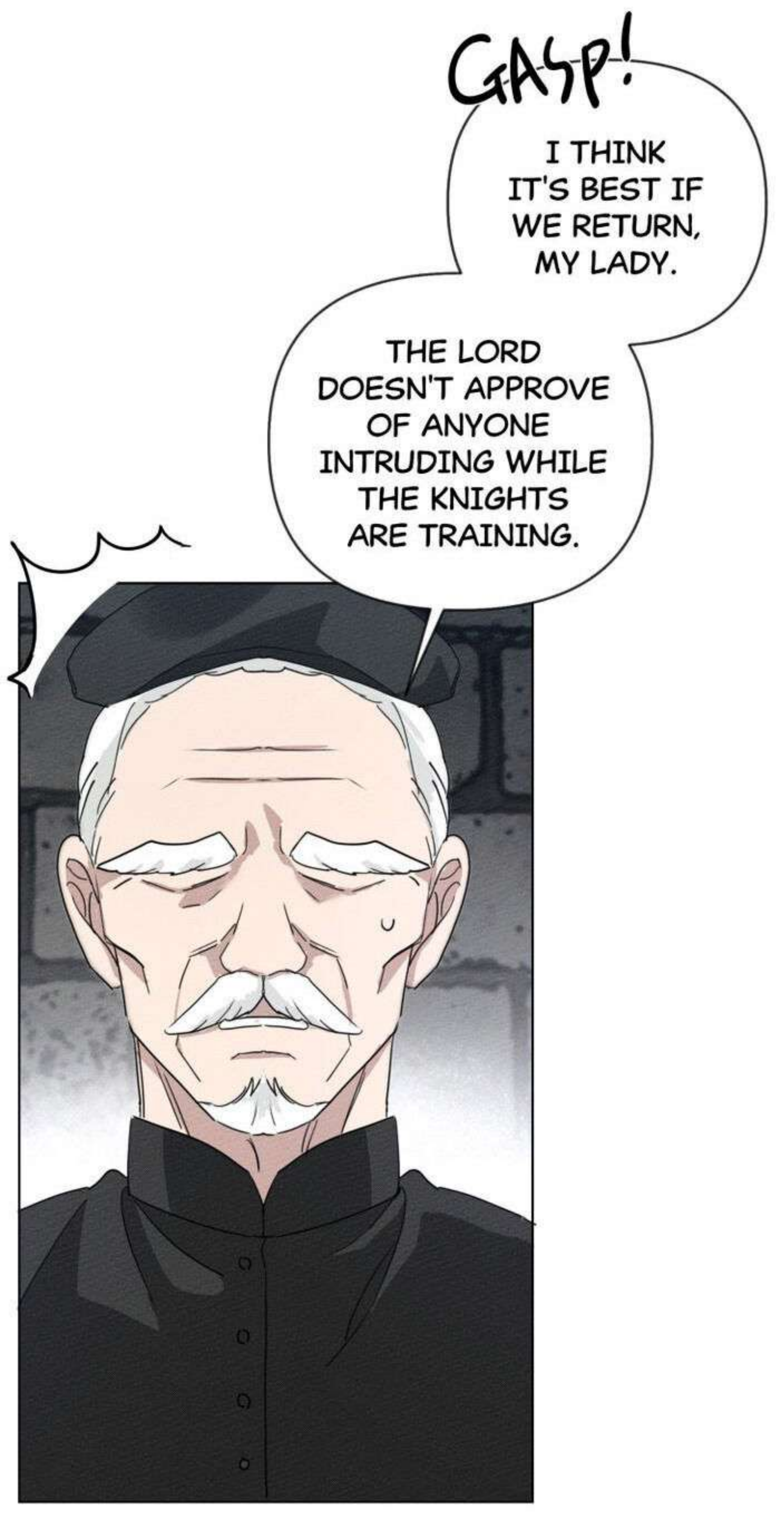

S-SO, TH-THIS IS THE G-GARDEN?
......
THE... GREAT HALL... TO BE PRECISE, MY LADY. HAHAHA.

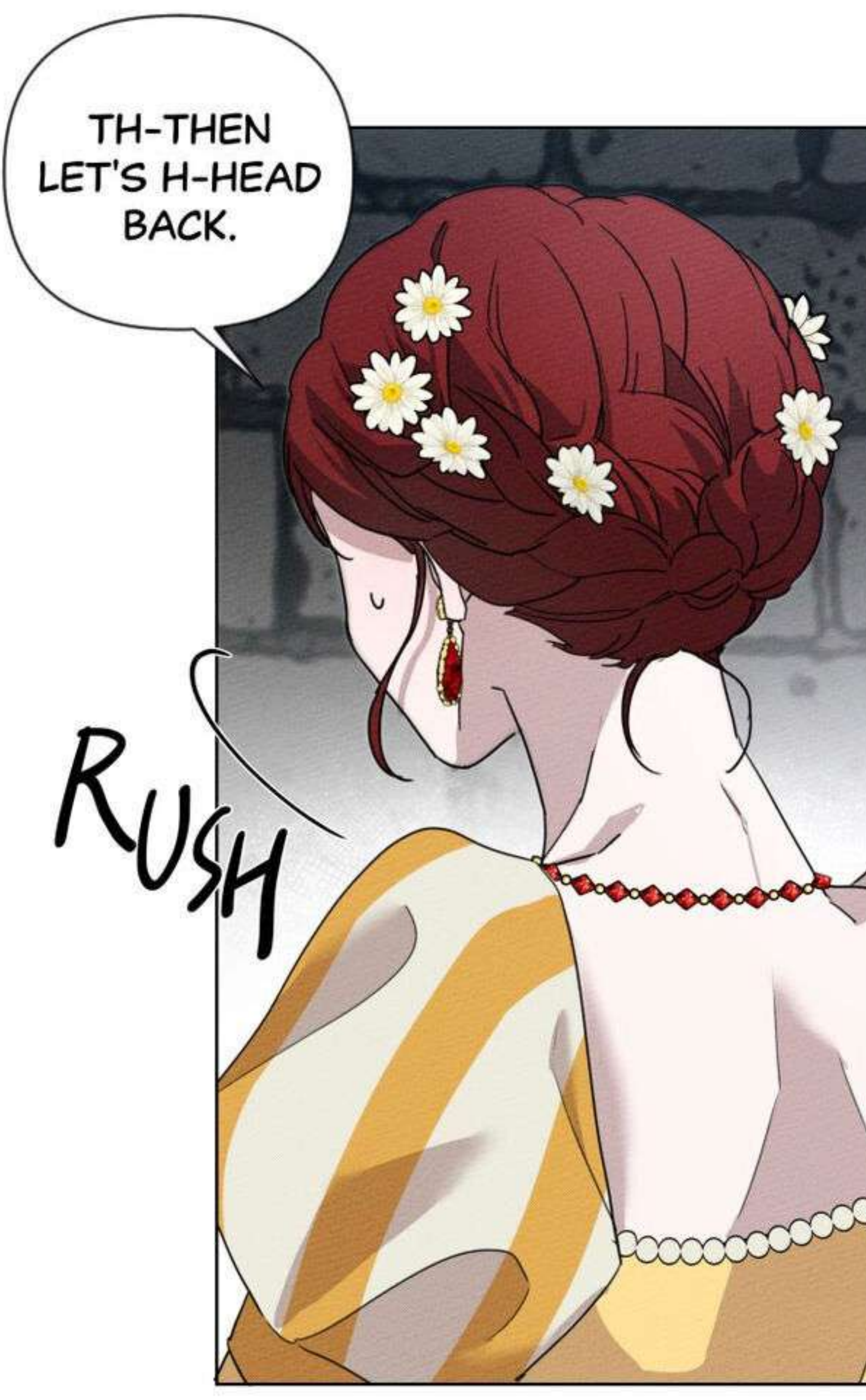

I-IS THERE NO G-GARDENER?
WELL, YOU SEE... THERE'S NO GARDENER, PER SE... THE SERVANTS USUALLY TAKE TURNS CLEANING...
BUT SINCE WE'RE SHORT ON STAFF...

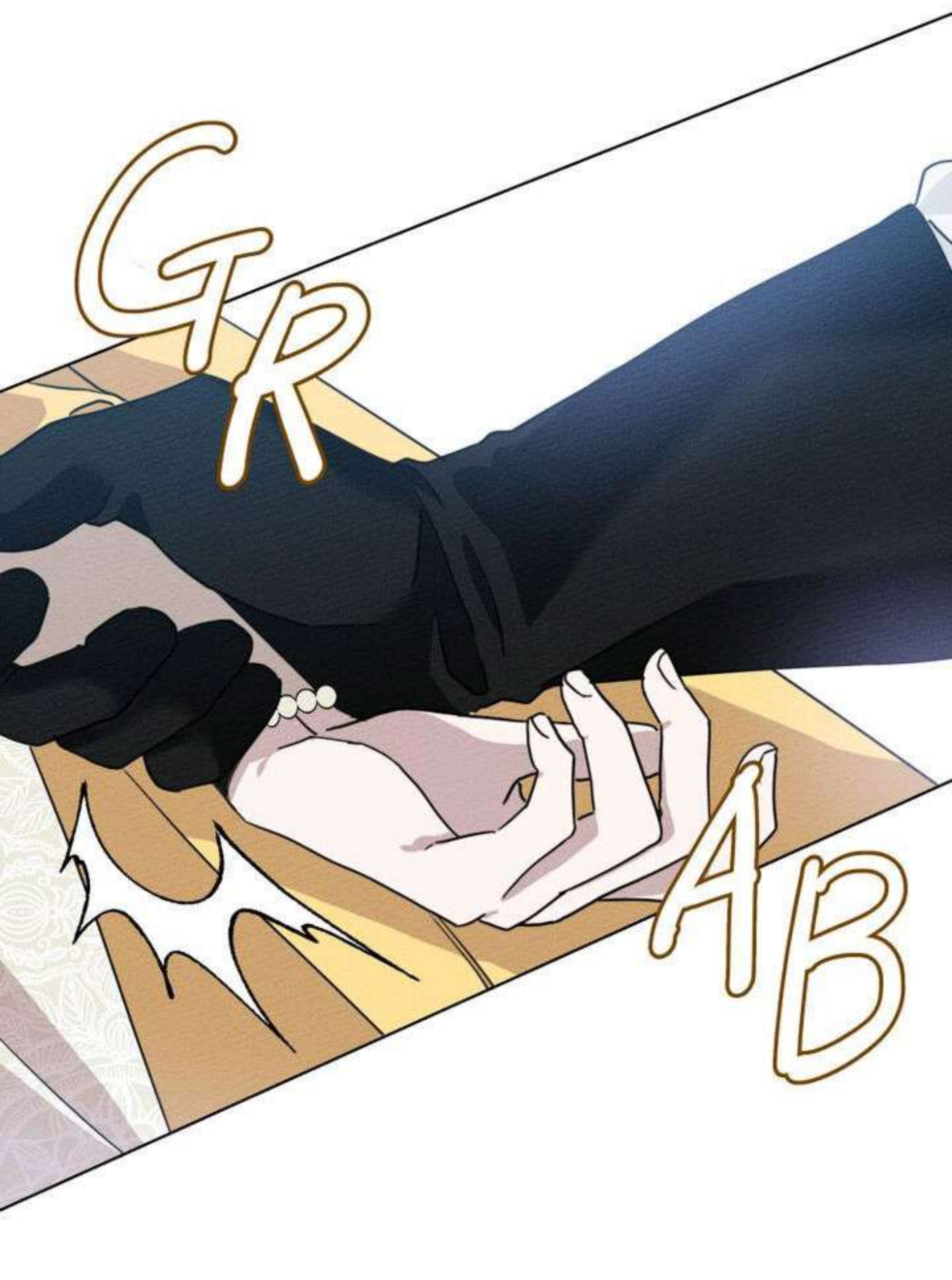

I'D L-LIKE TO SEE THE A-ANNEX NOW.
CERTAINLY, MY LADY. AS I EXPLAINED EARLIER,
THE ANNEX HAS BEEN RENOVATED AND CURRENTLY SERVES AS LODGING FOR THE SQUIRES.


CLANG
CLANG


OH MY, THEY'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF THEIR DRILLS.
CLANG
CLANG


GASP!
I THINK IT'S BEST IF WE RETURN, MY LADY.
THE LORD DOESN'T APPROVE OF ANYONE INTRUDING WHILE THE KNIGHTS ARE TRAINING.


TH-THEN LET'S H-HEAD BACK.
RUSH

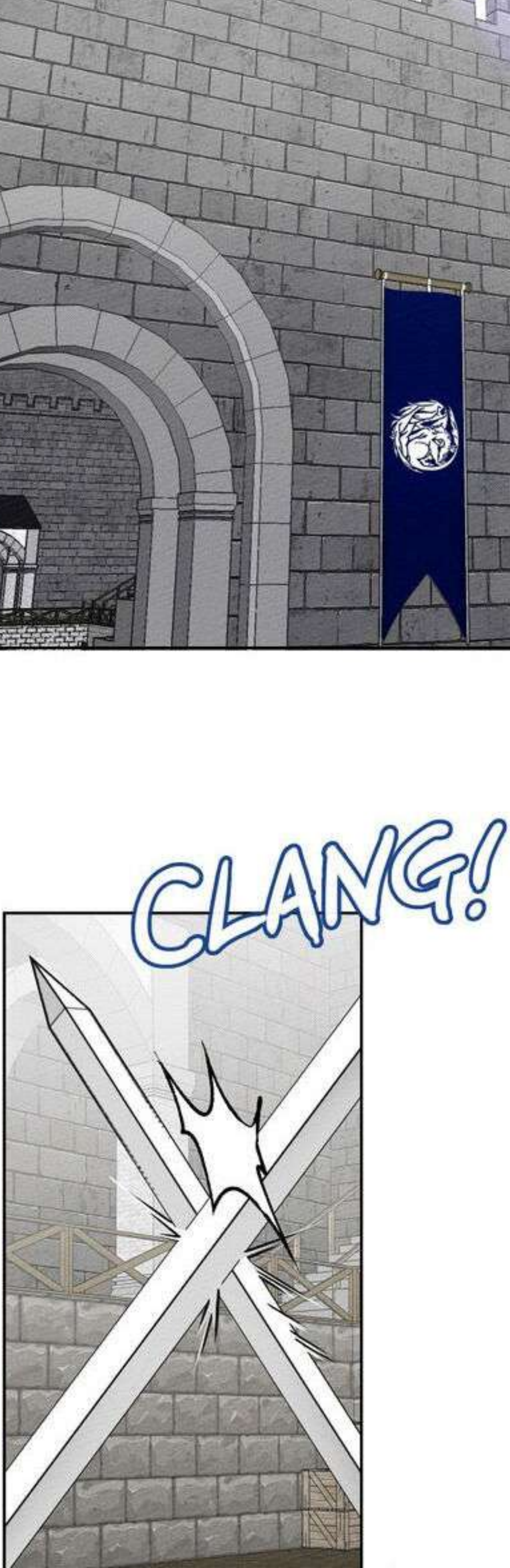

GRAB

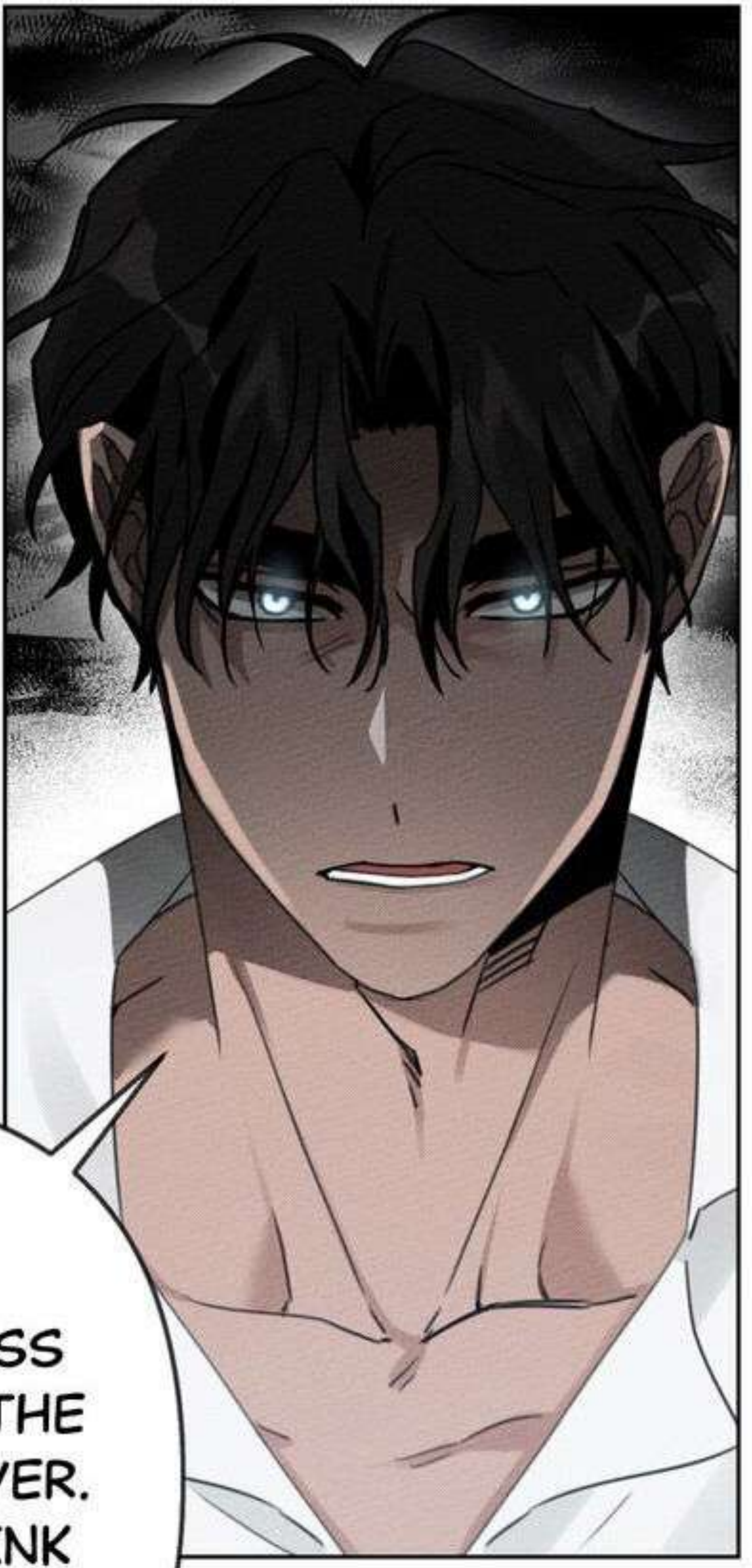
Under the Oak Tree

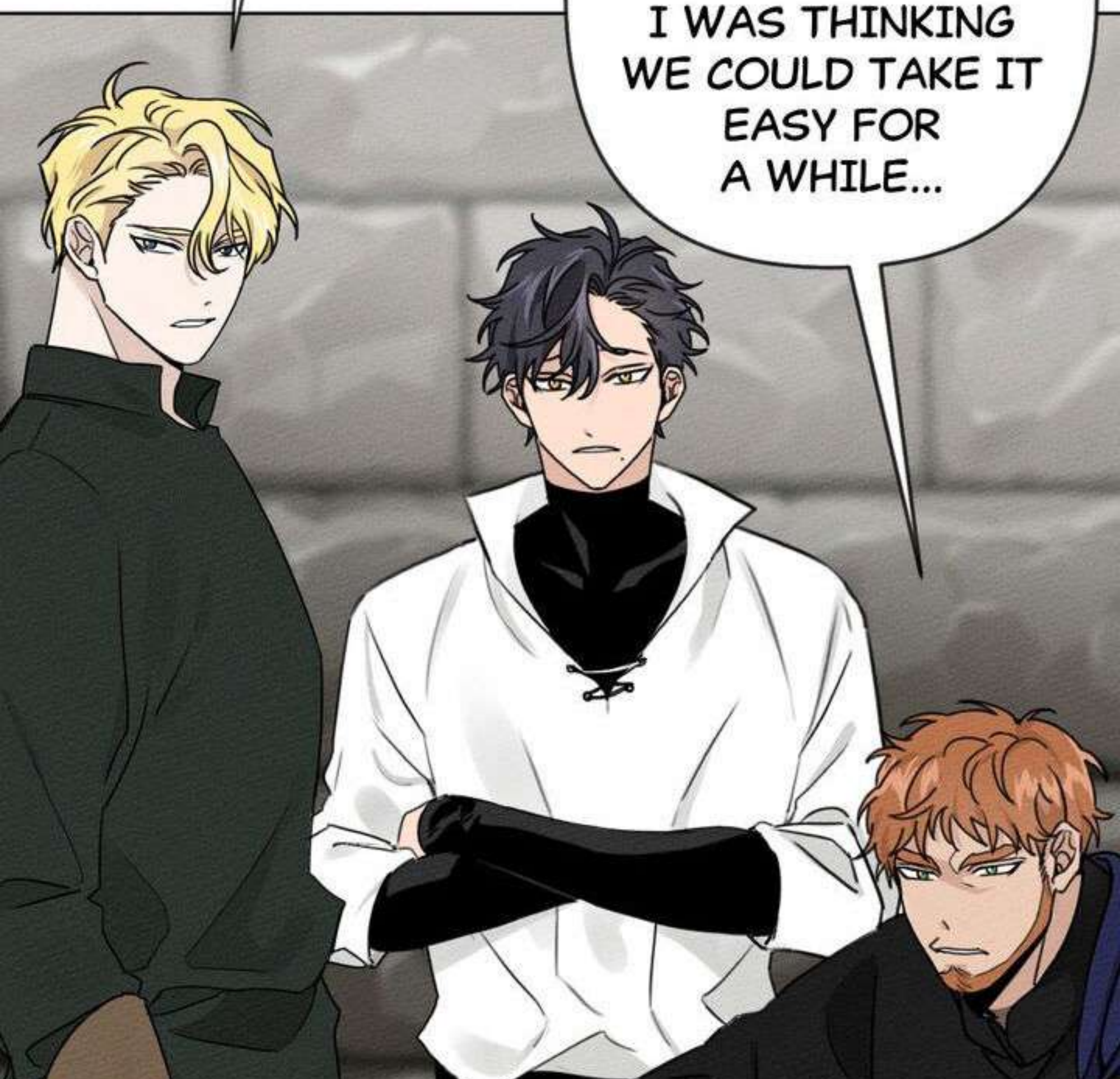
ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

10

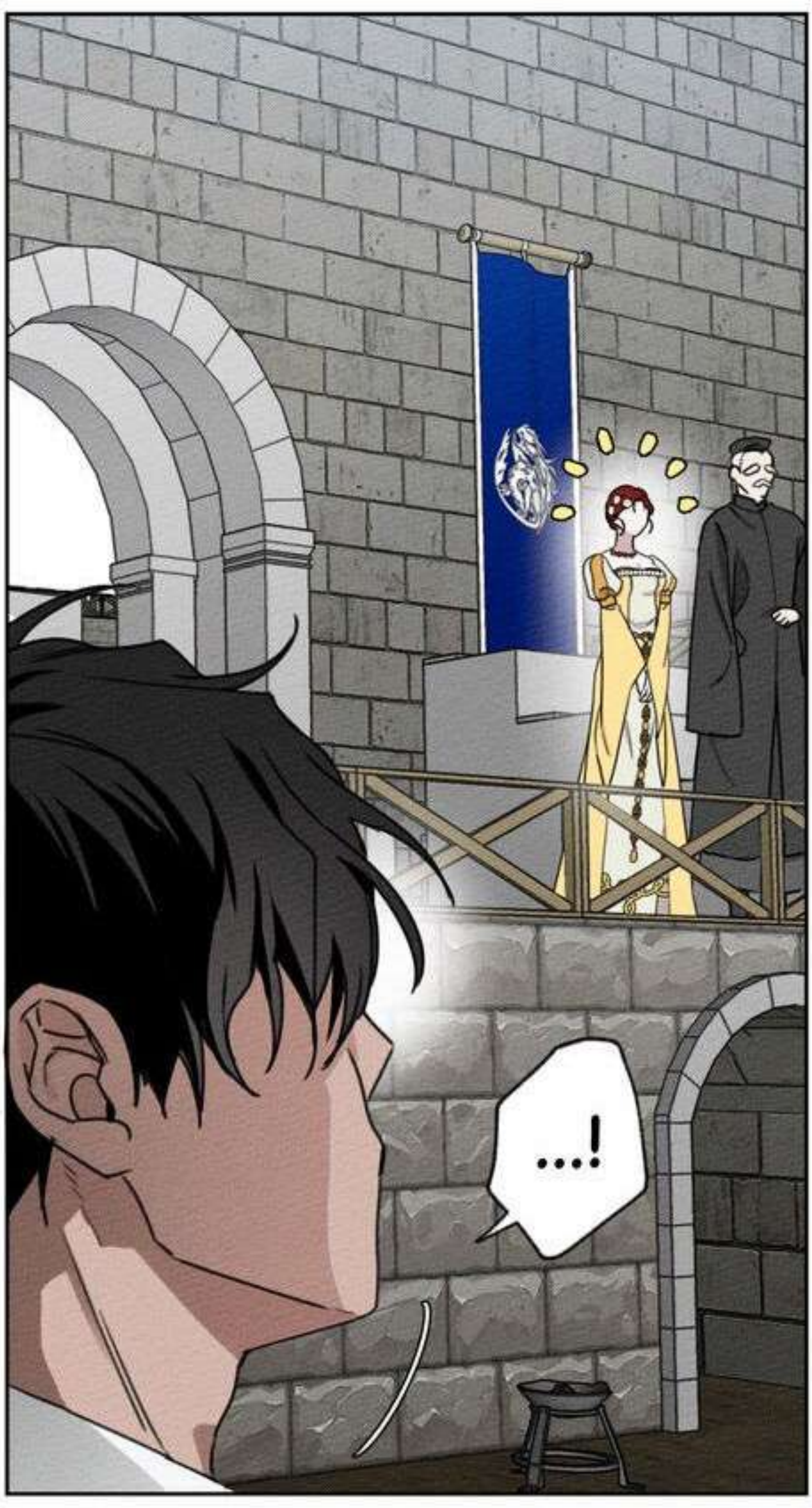
CLANG!
CLANG!
CLANG

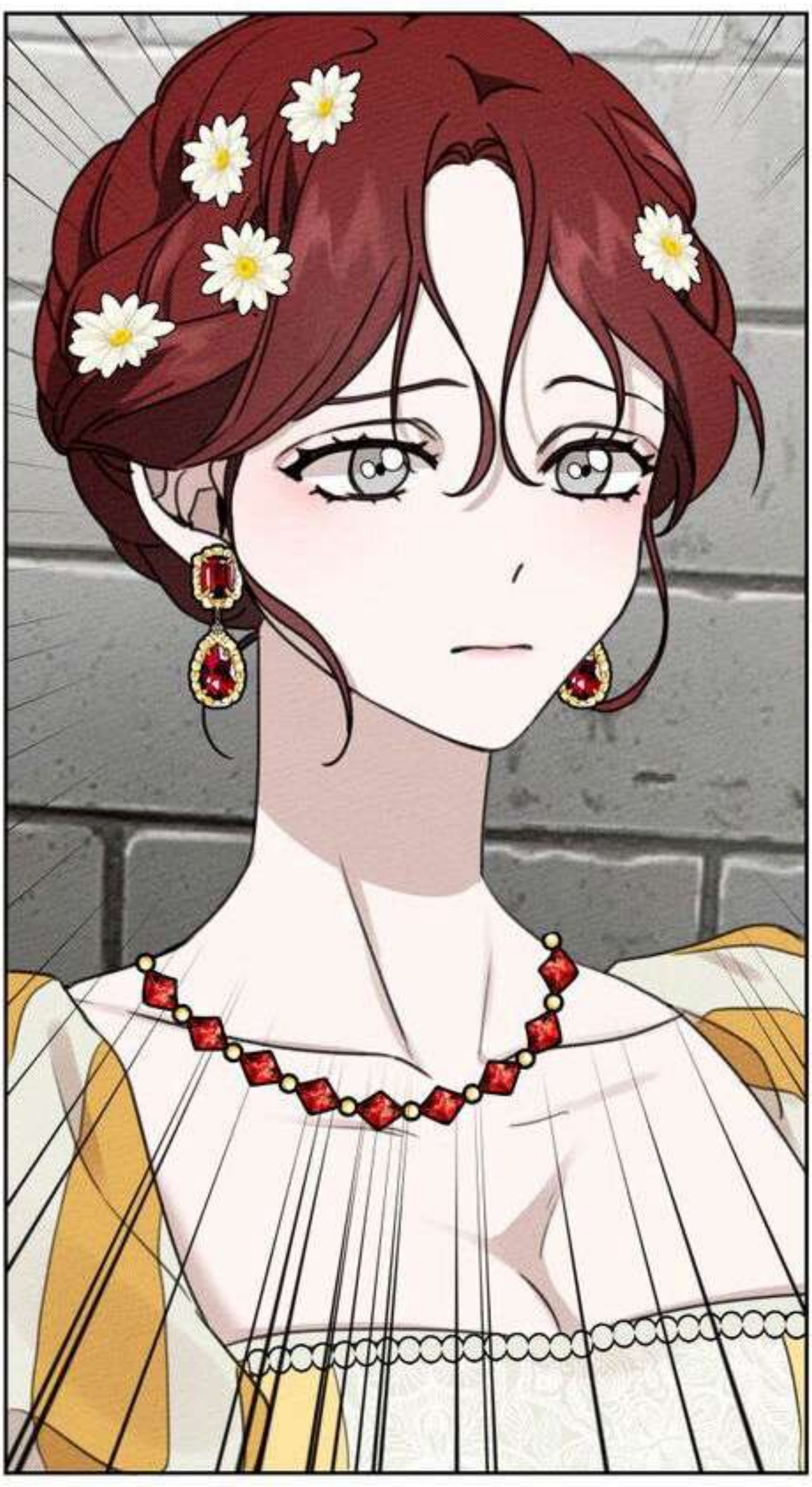

CLANG!


GRIM..
THERE'S NO EXCUSE FOR THIS SLOPPINESS JUST BECAUSE THE CAMPAIGN IS OVER. DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT LOWERING YOUR SWORDS UNTIL I SAY SO.
YES, SIR!


WHY'S HE SO INTENSE THIS MORNING? DID SOMETHING HAPPEN LAST NIGHT?
HA!
HE'S BEEN LIKE THAT SINCE DAYBREAK. DAMN IT... AND HERE I WAS THINKING WE COULD TAKE IT EASY FOR A WHILE...
MAYBE SOMEONE TICKED HIM

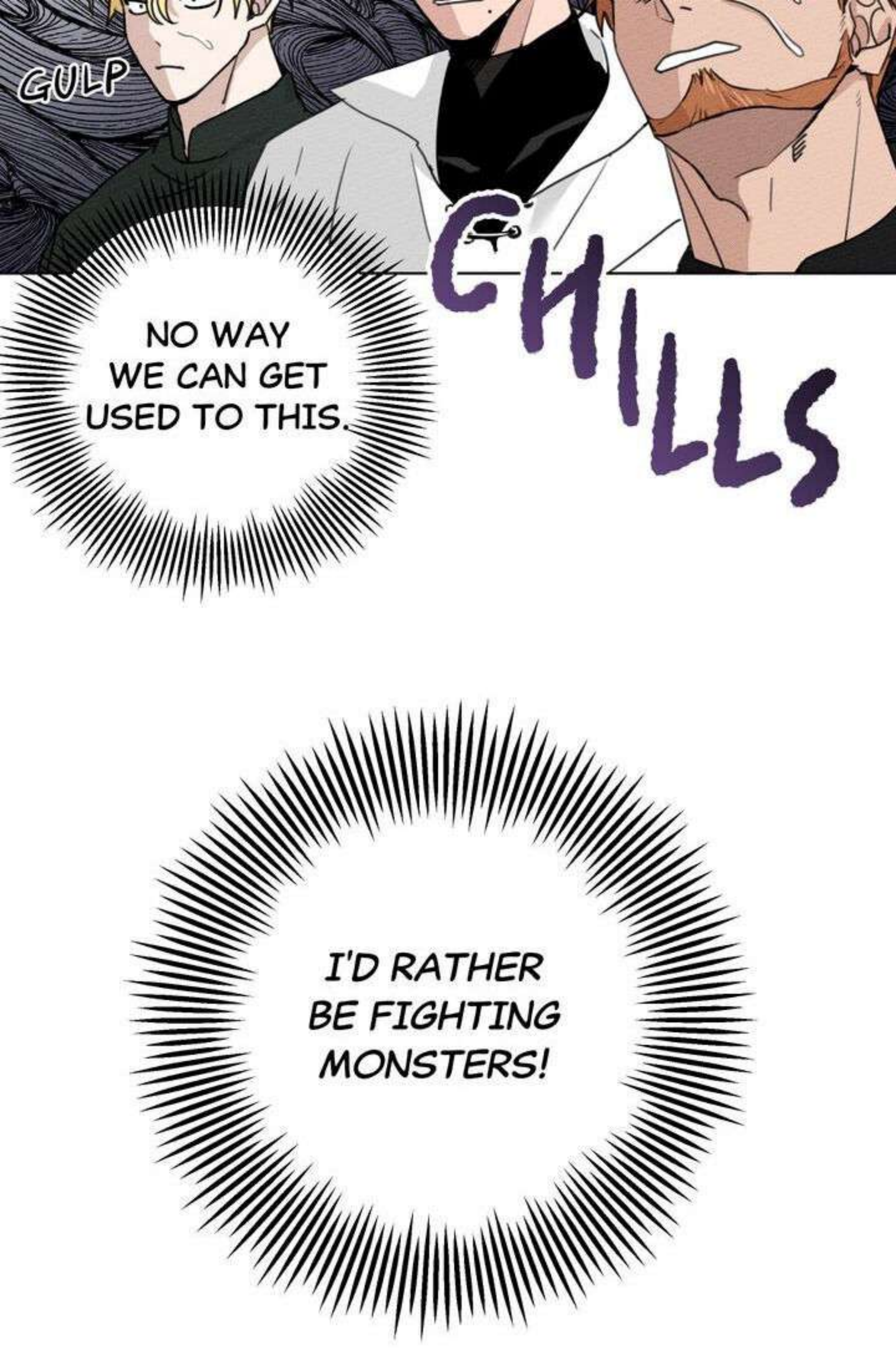
PICKED HIM
OFF.

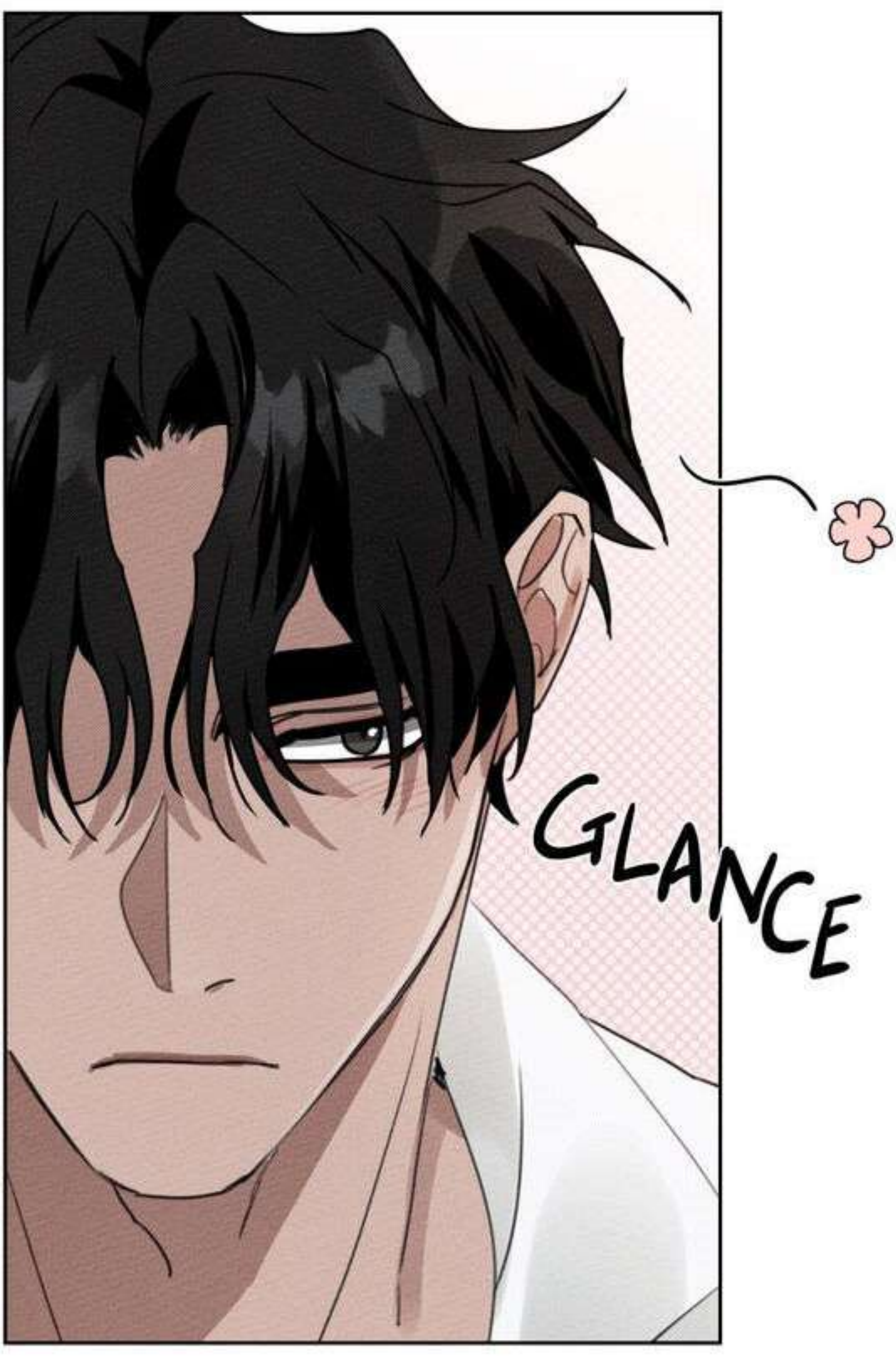

...!

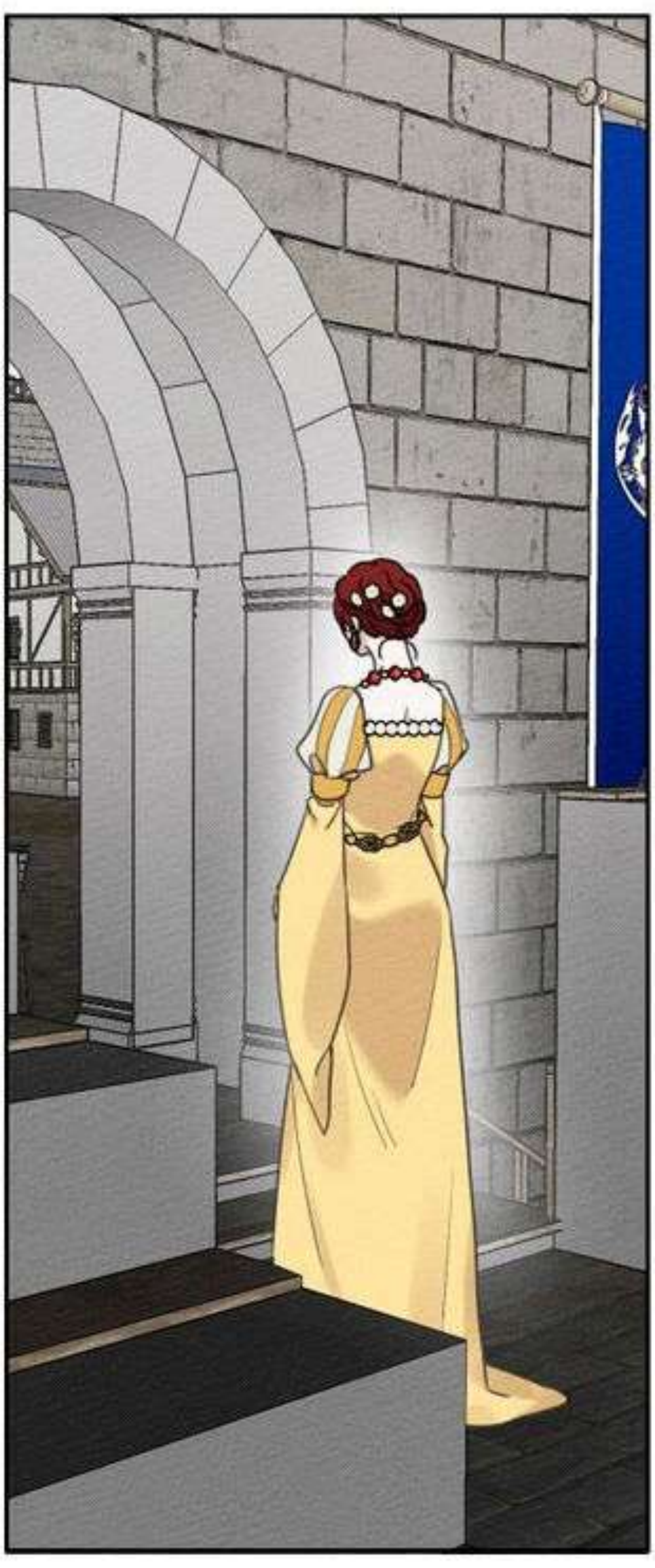


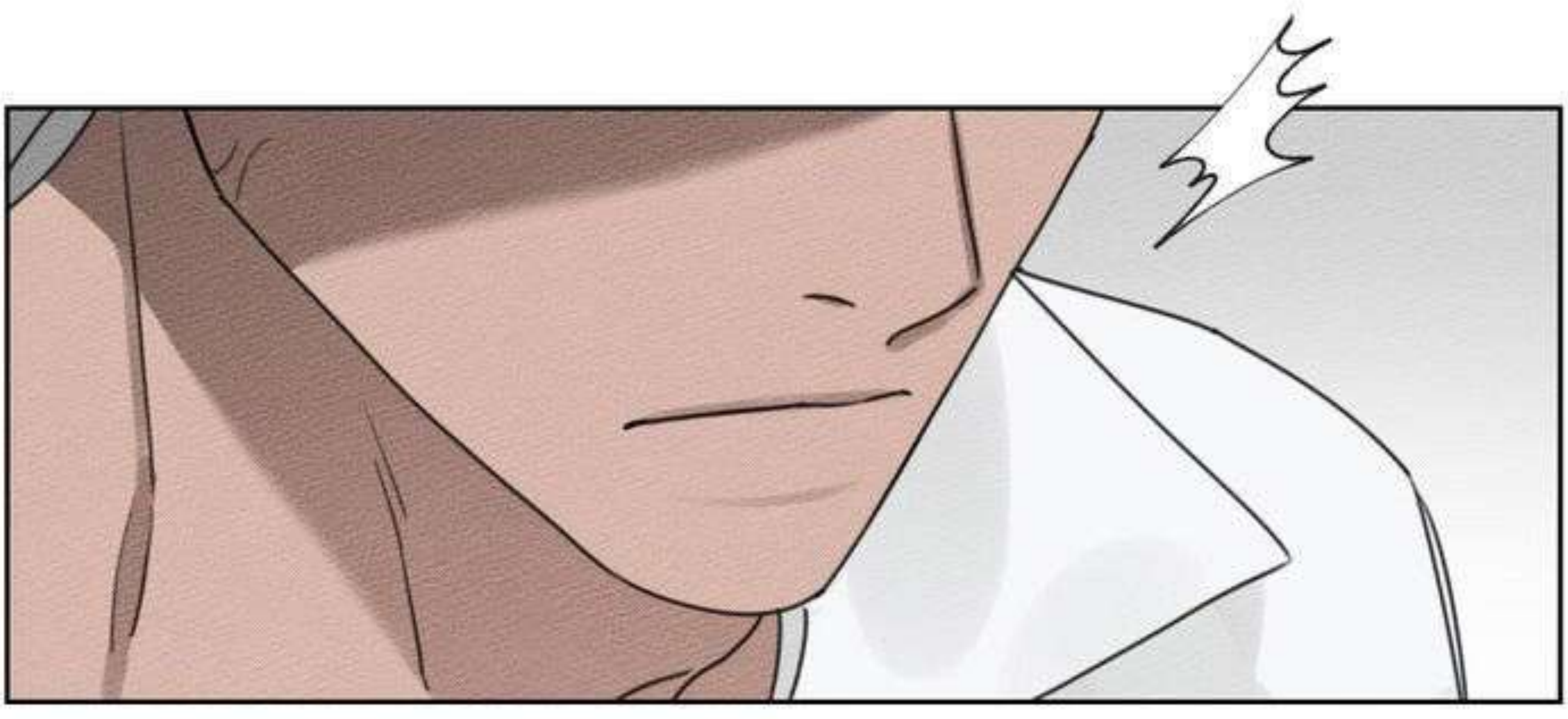
BOINK
HUH?

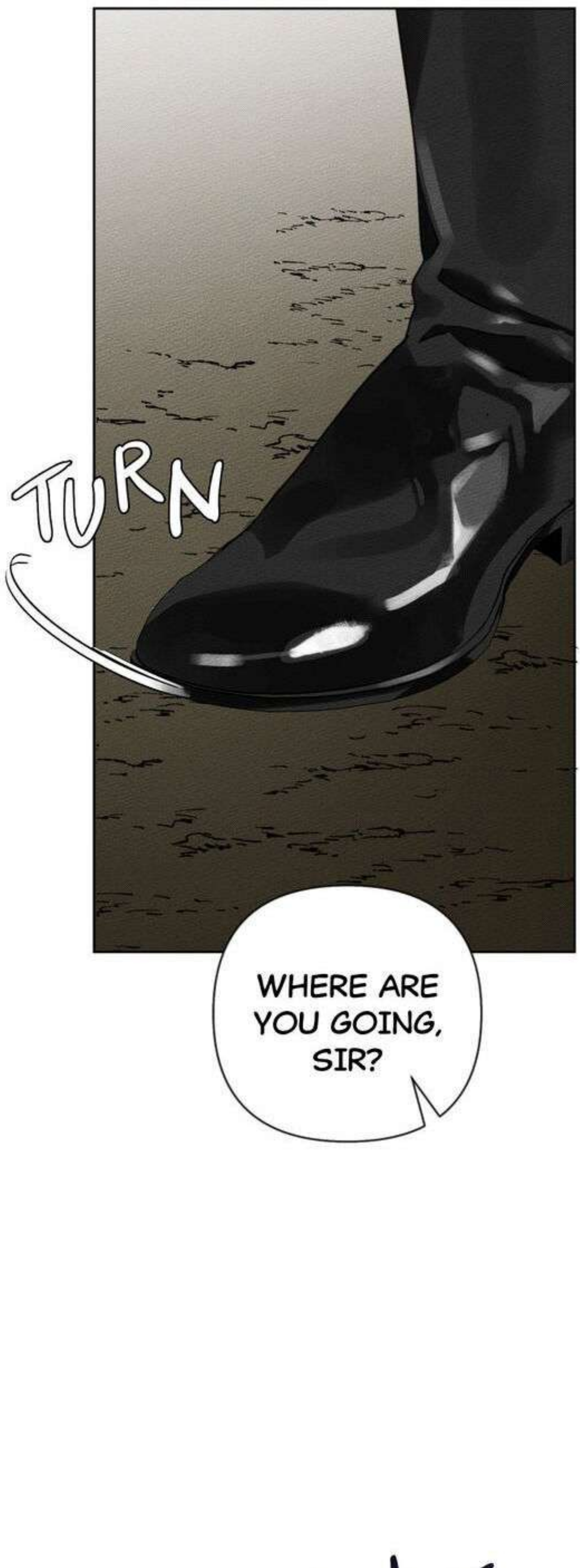
GENTLE
GENTLE
WHAT'S WITH THAT LOOK?

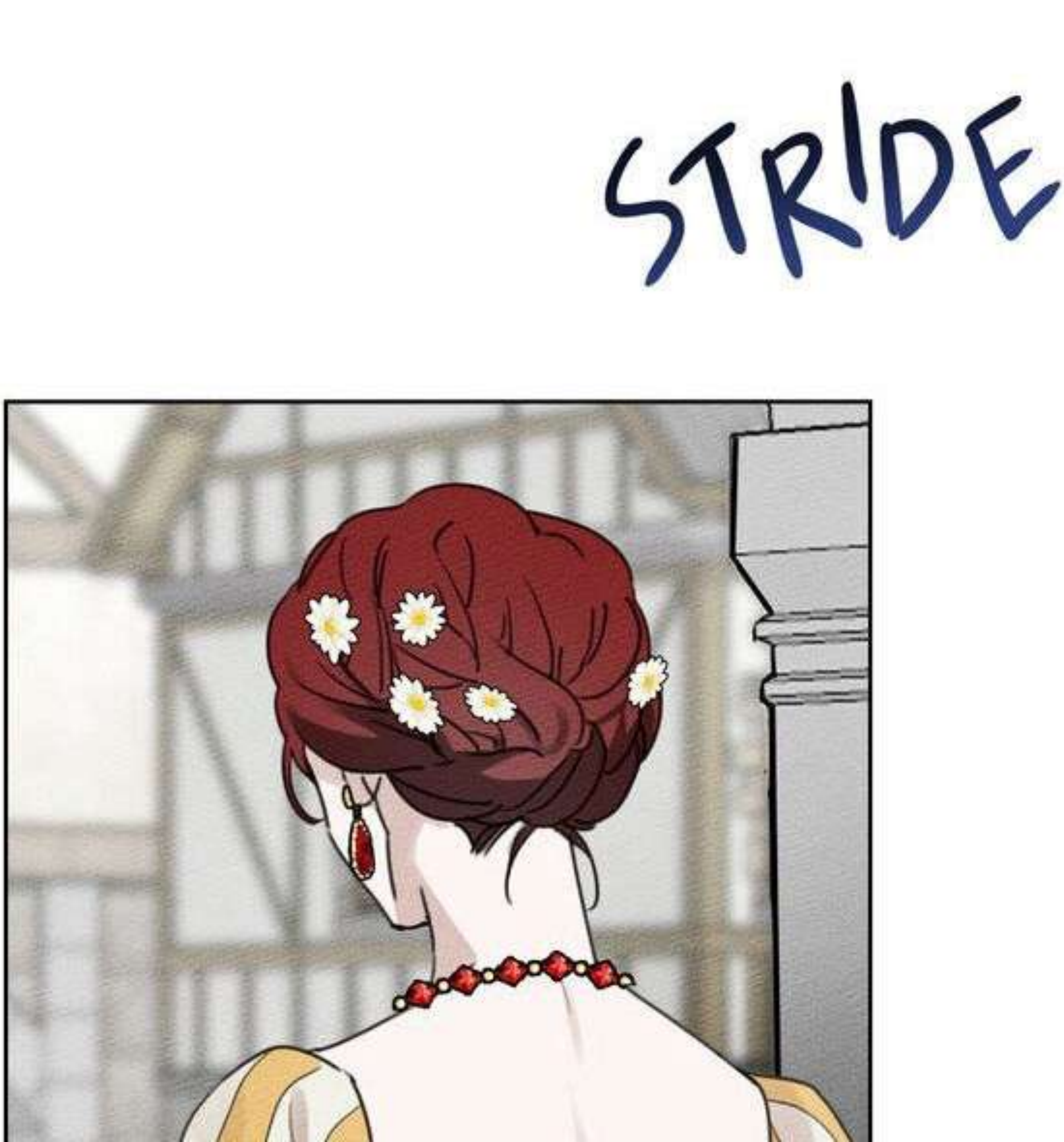

GULP
CHILLS
NO WAY WE CAN GET USED TO THIS.
I'D RATHER BE FIGHTING MONSTERS!

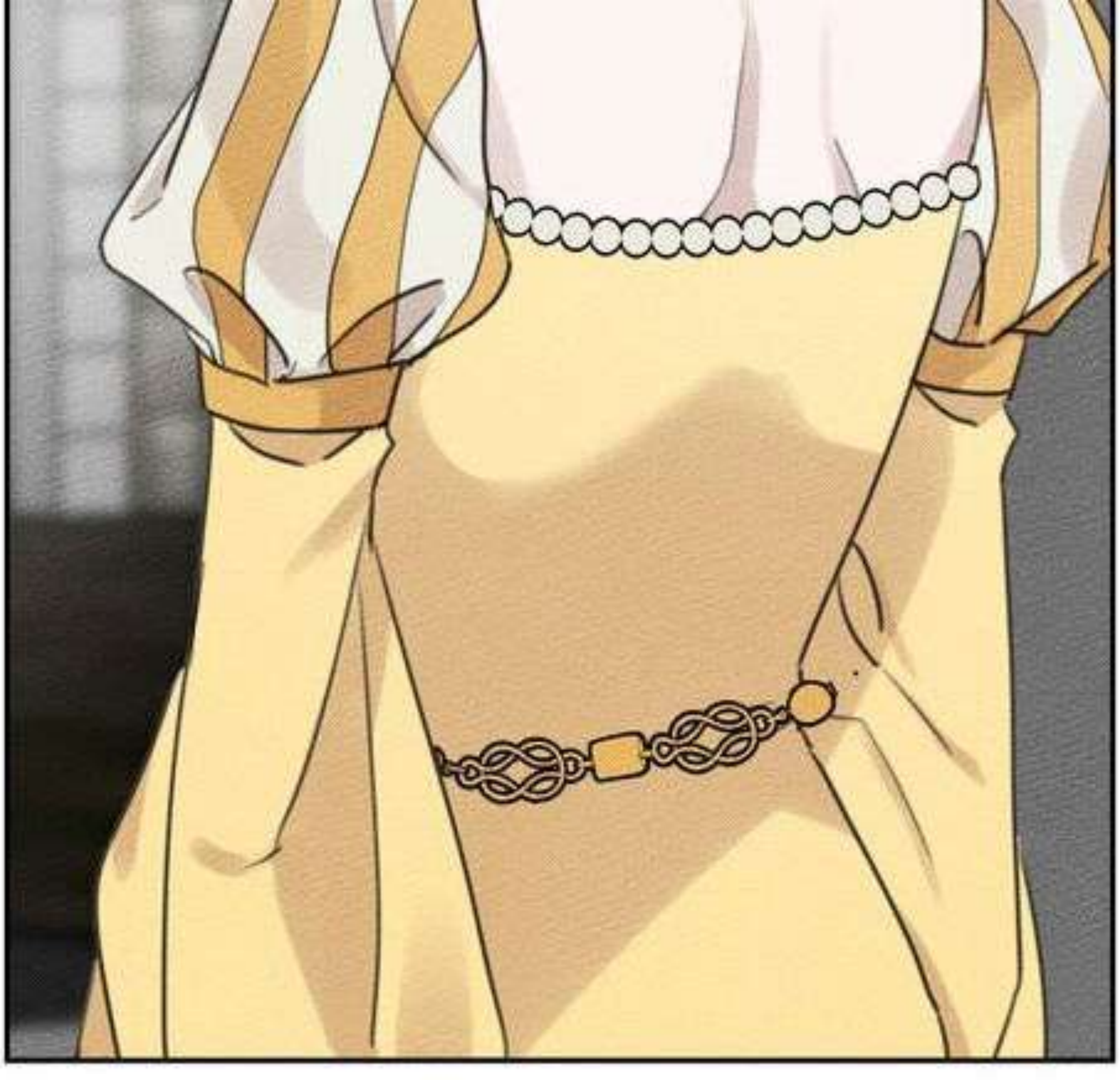

GLANCE

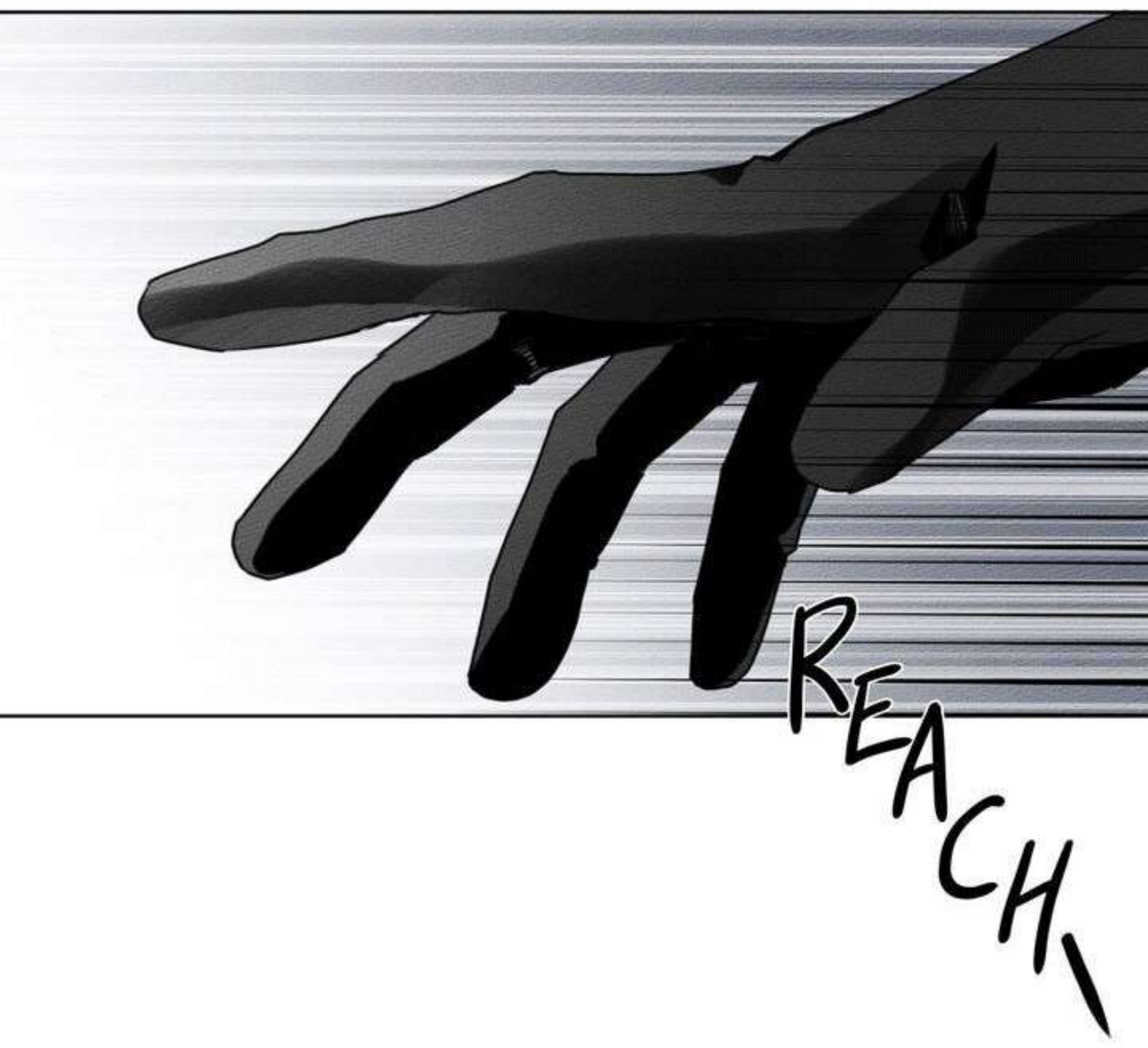


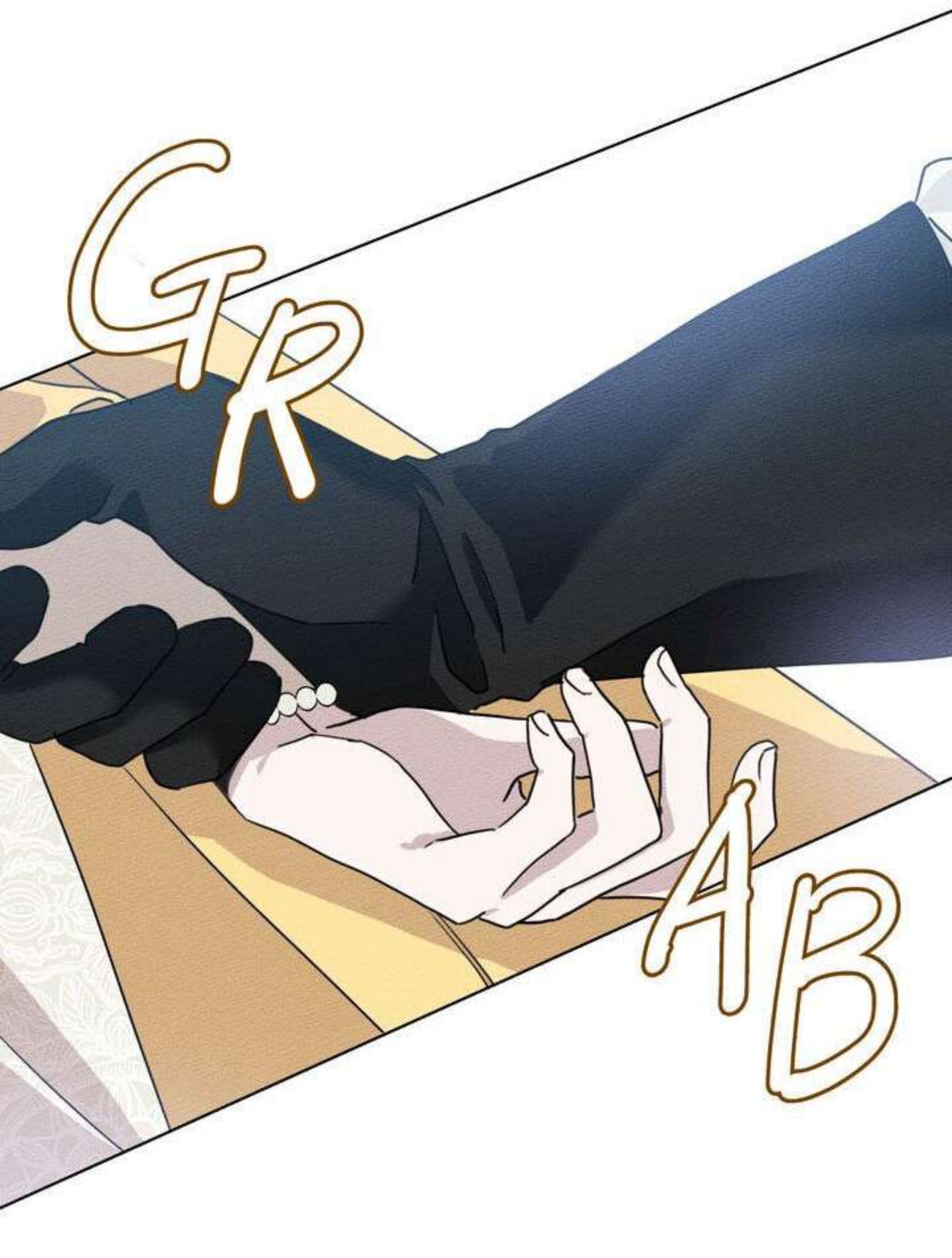


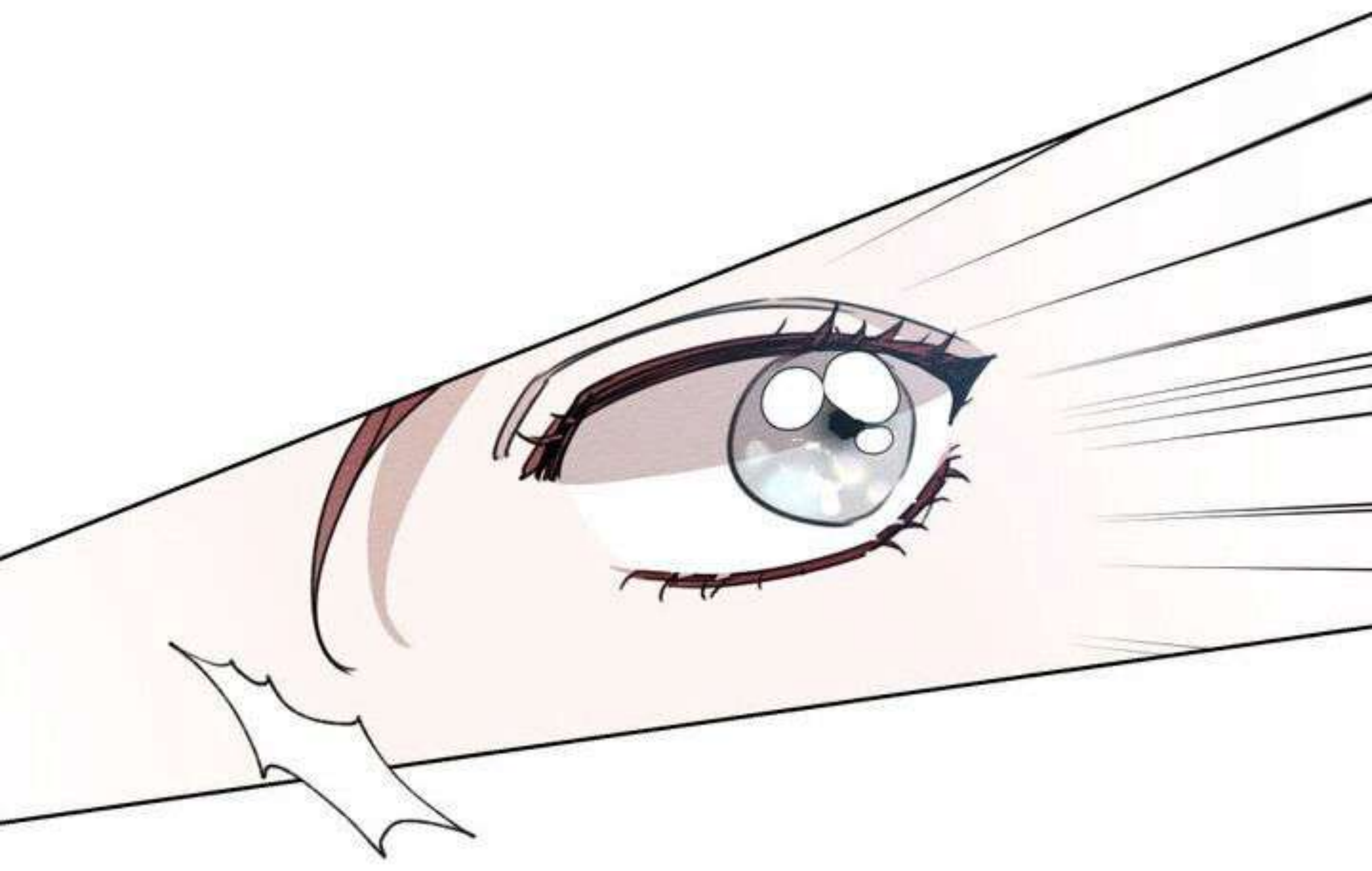

TURN
WHERE ARE YOU GOING, SIR?

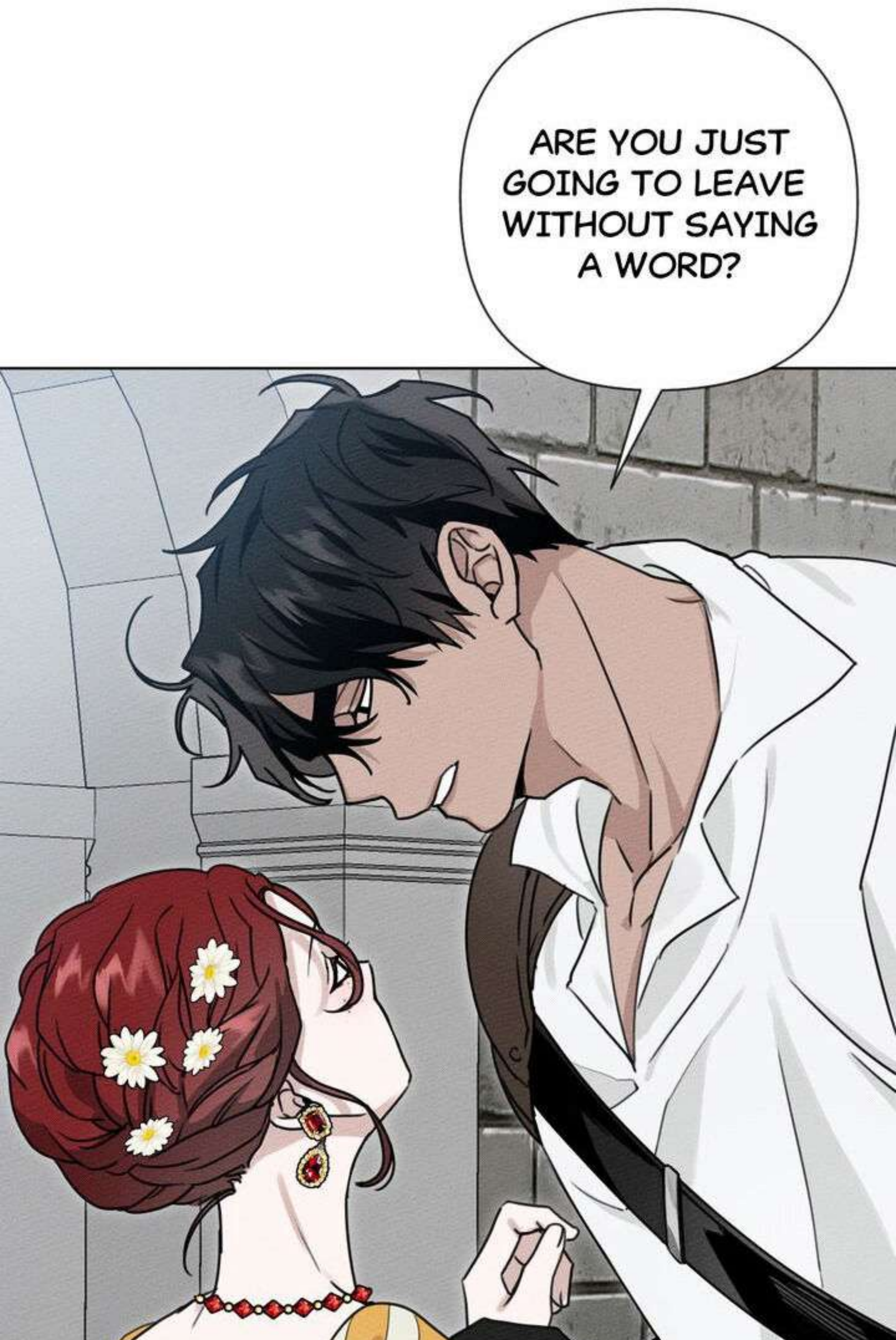

STRIDE

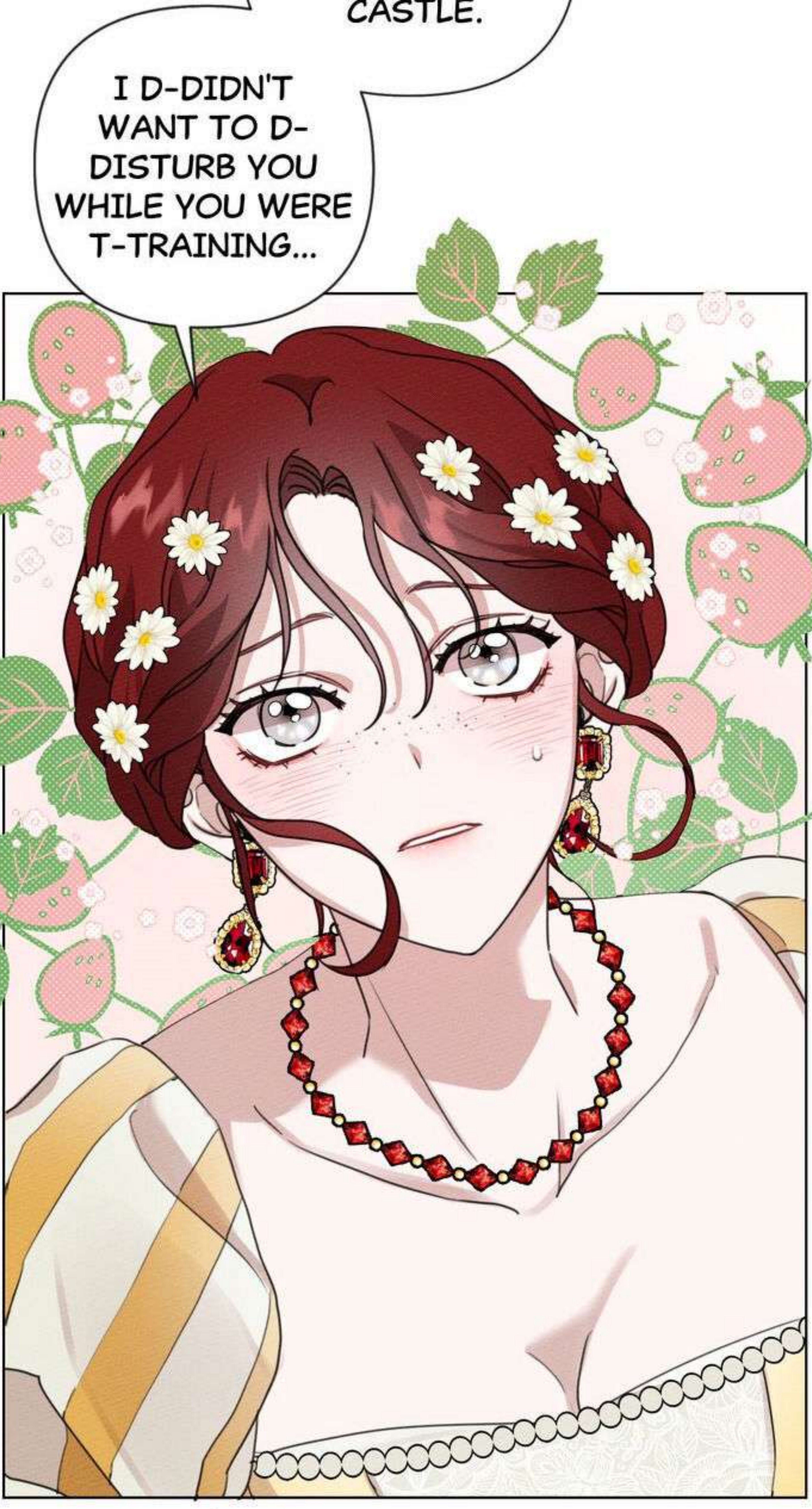

STRIDE
STRIDE

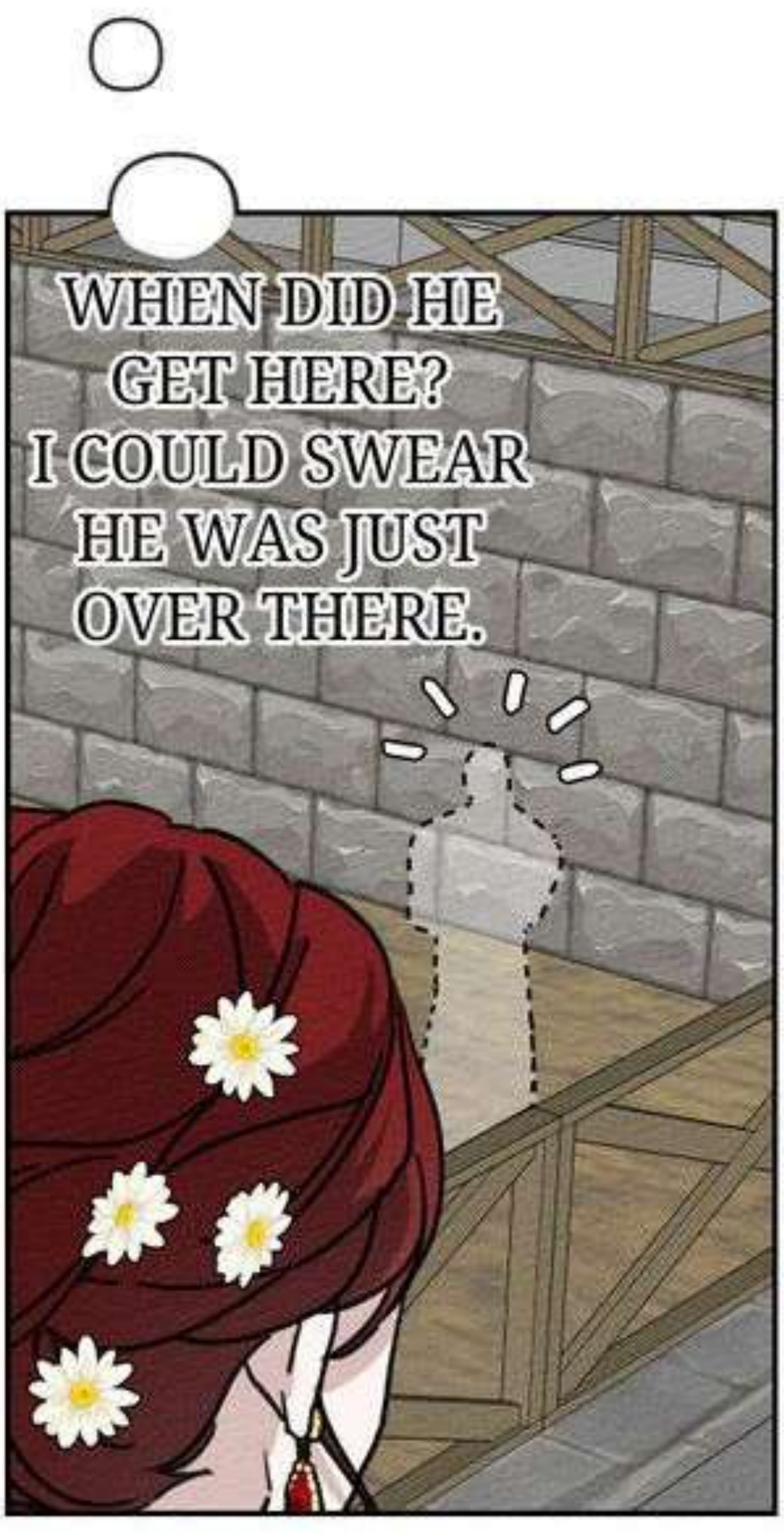

REACH

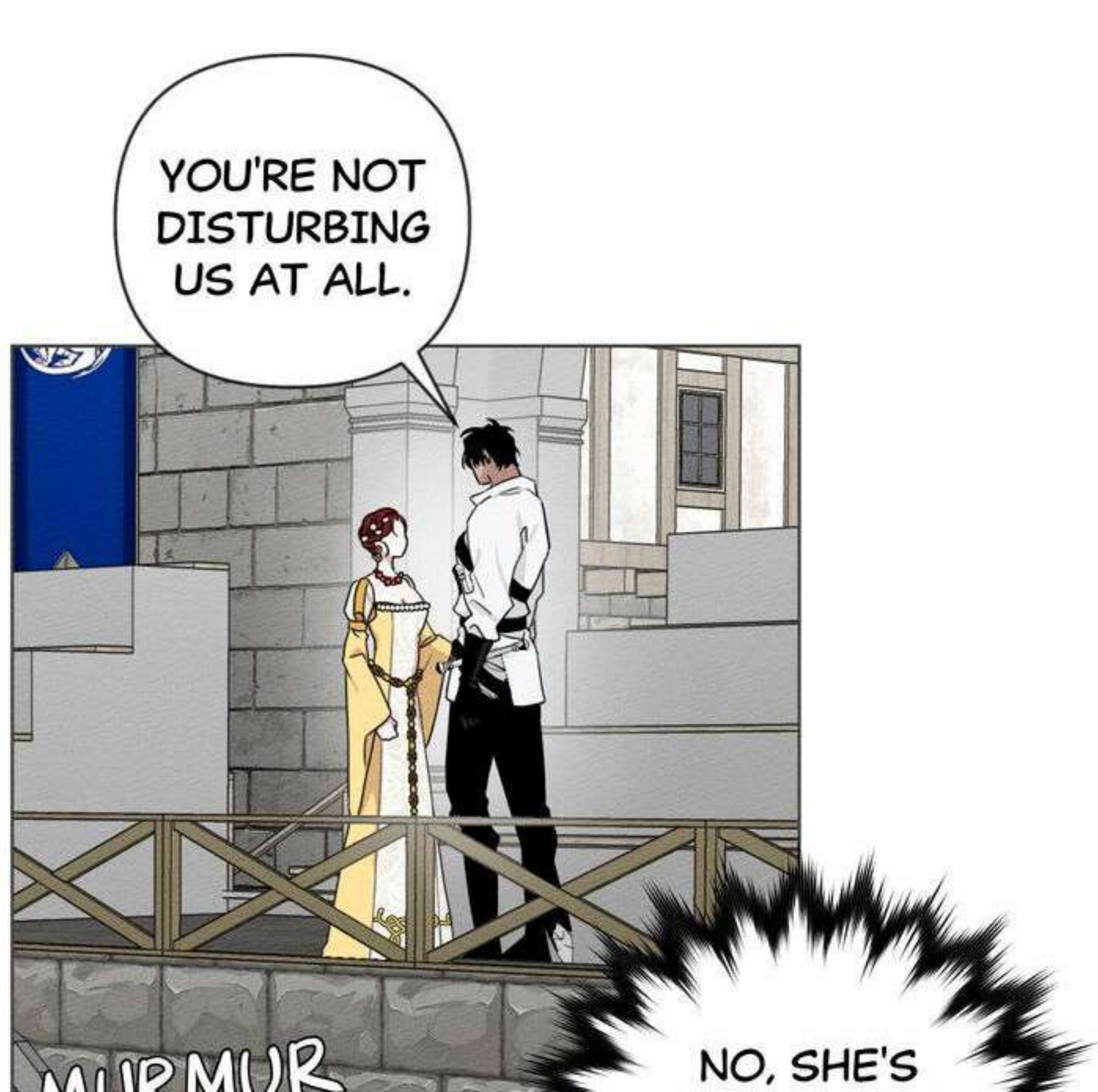

GRAB

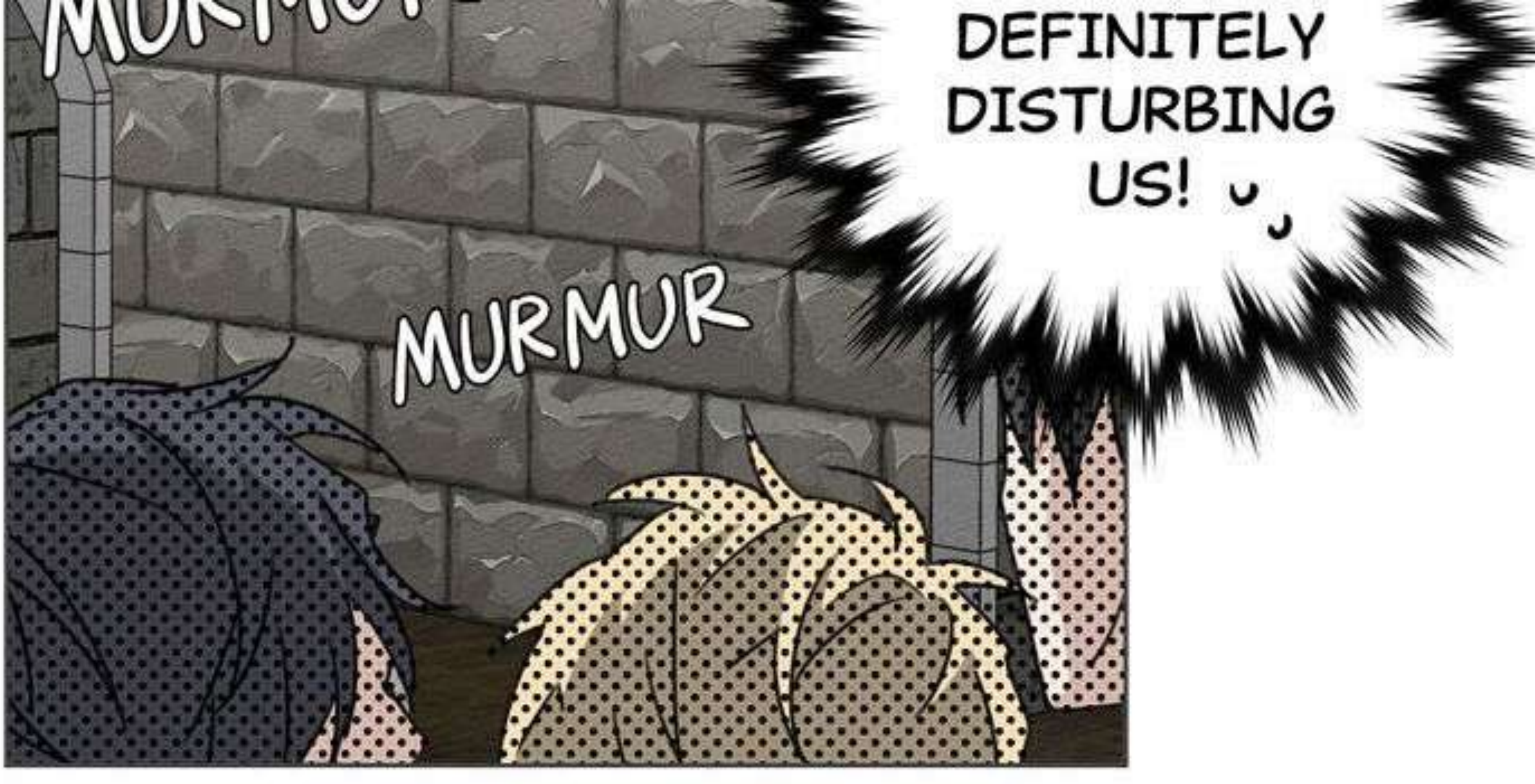


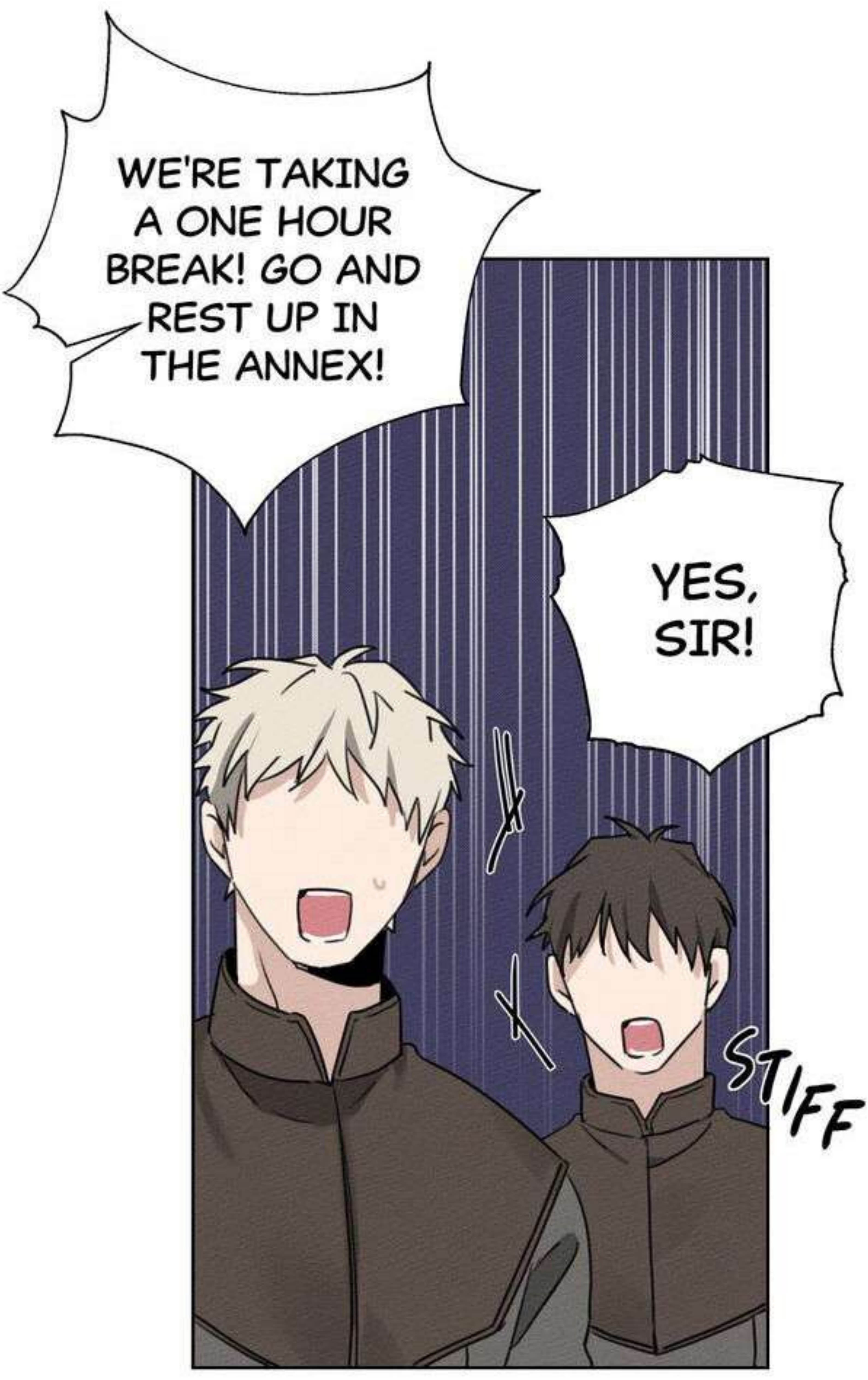

ARE YOU JUST GOING TO LEAVE WITHOUT SAYING A WORD?
!!
THE S-STEWARD WAS SHOWING M-ME AROUND THE C-

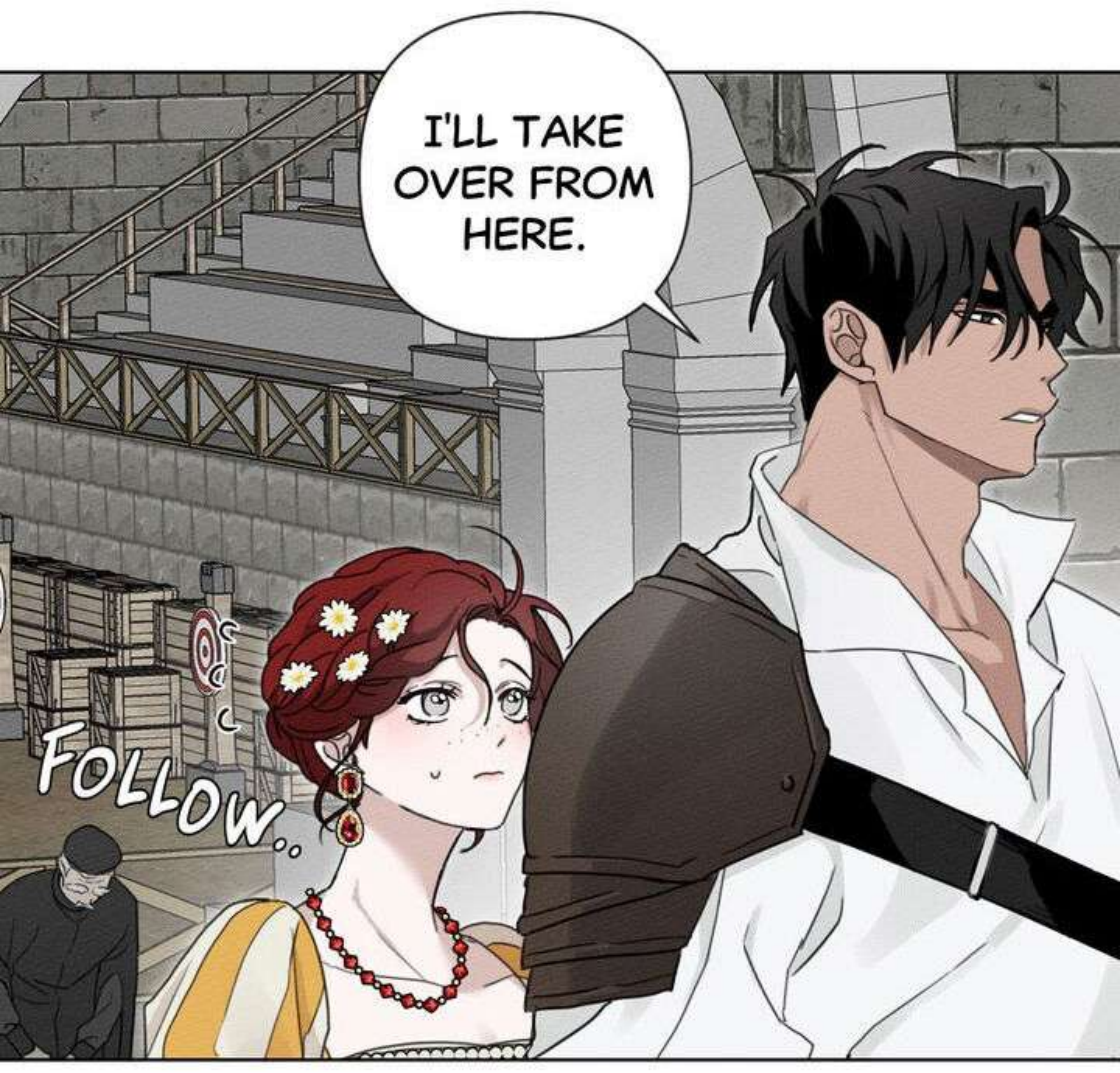

CASTLE.
I D-DIDN'T WANT TO D-DISTURB YOU WHILE YOU WERE T-TRAINING...

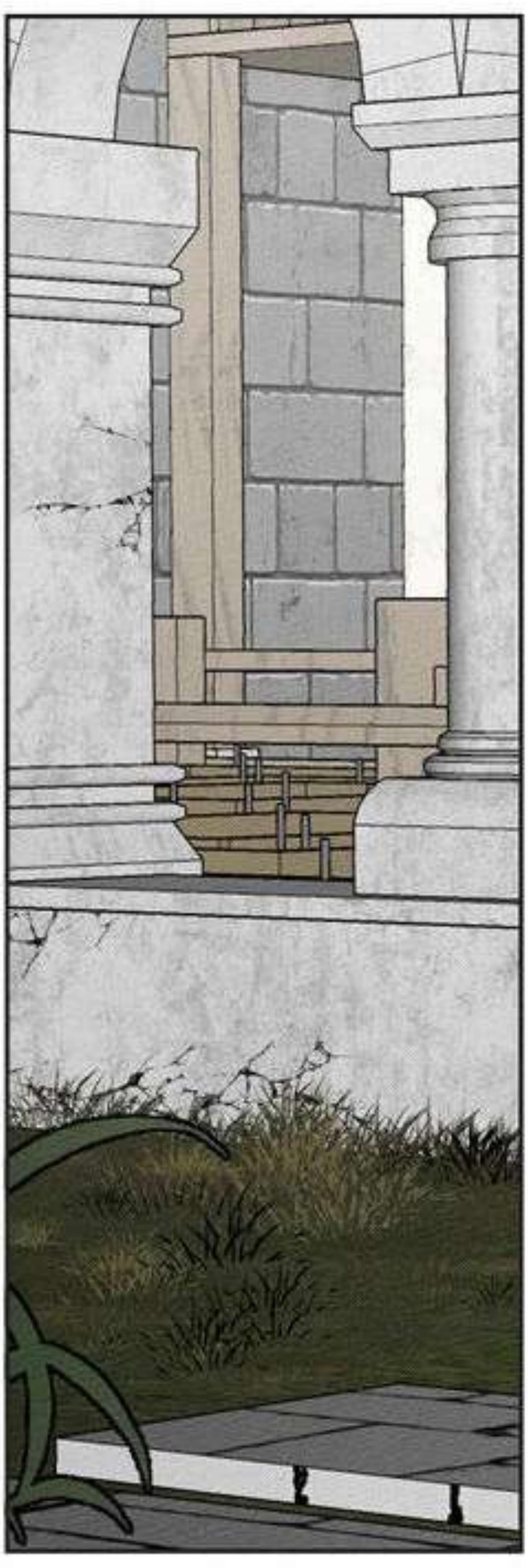

WHEN DID HE GET HERE? I COULD SWEAR HE WAS JUST OVER THERE.

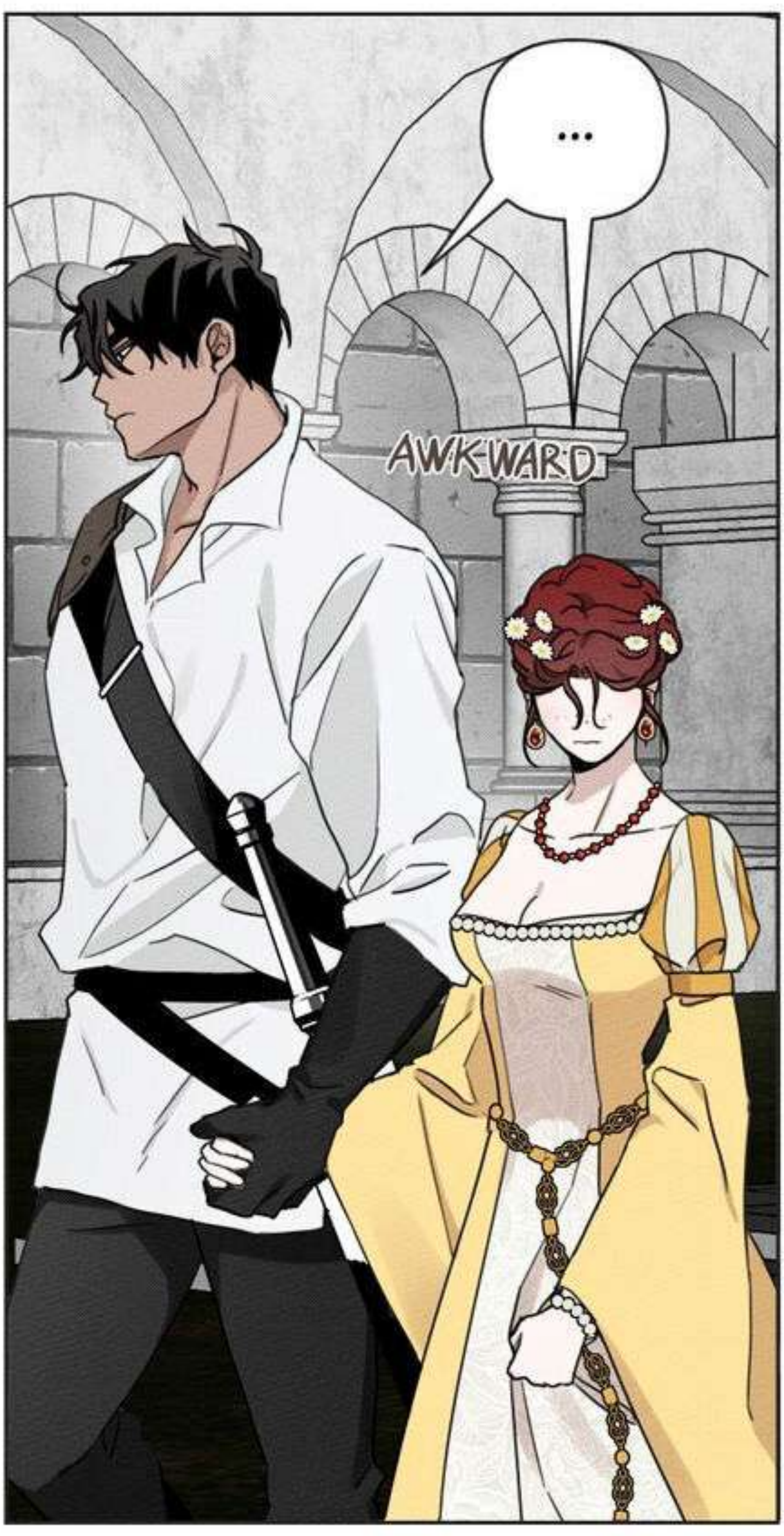

YOU'RE NOT DISTURBING US AT ALL.
MURMUR
NO, SHE'S


MURMUR
DEFINITELY DISTURBING US!

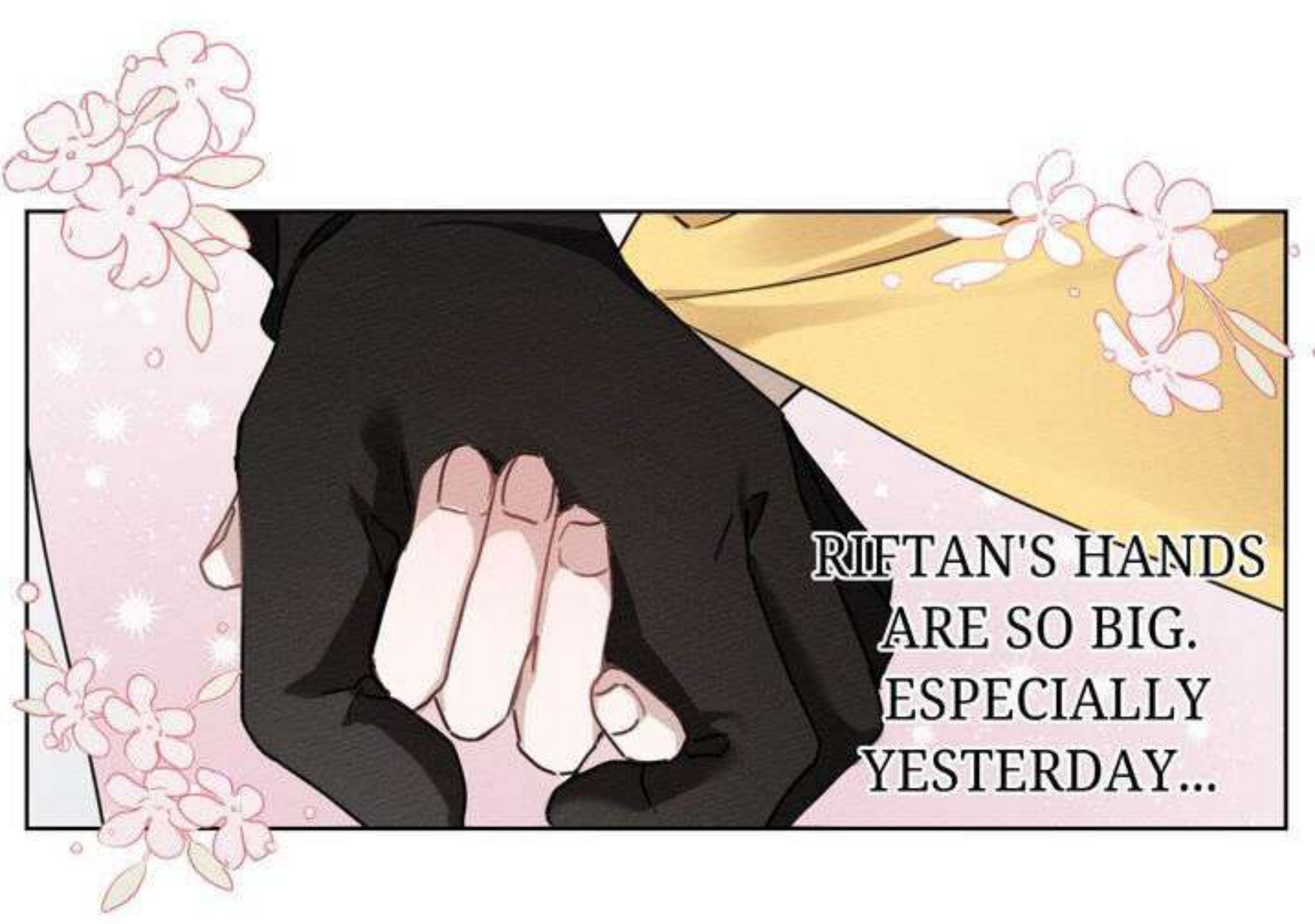

WE'RE TAKING A ONE HOUR BREAK! GO AND REST UP IN THE ANNEX!
YES, SIR!
STIFF

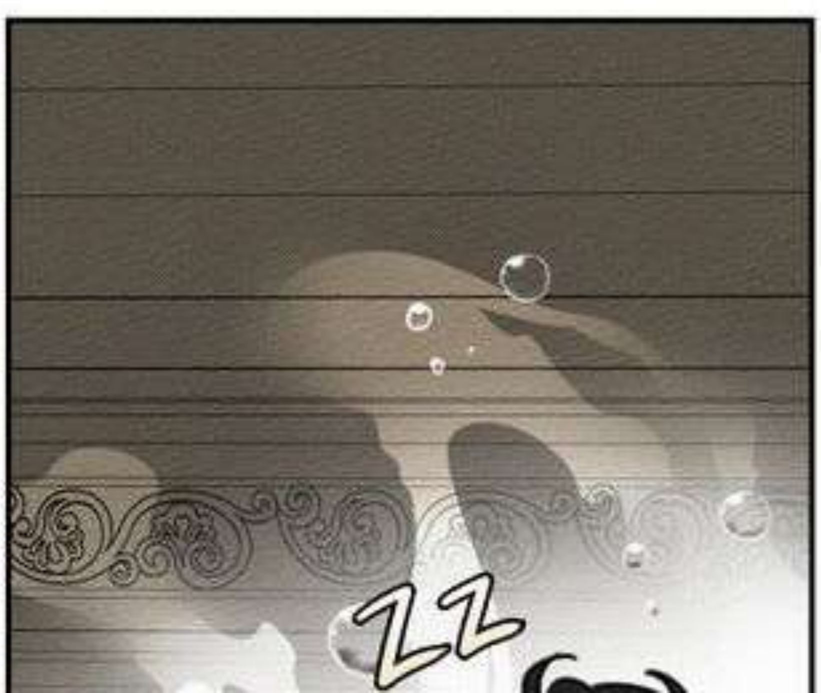

I'LL TAKE OVER FROM HERE.
FOLLOW..

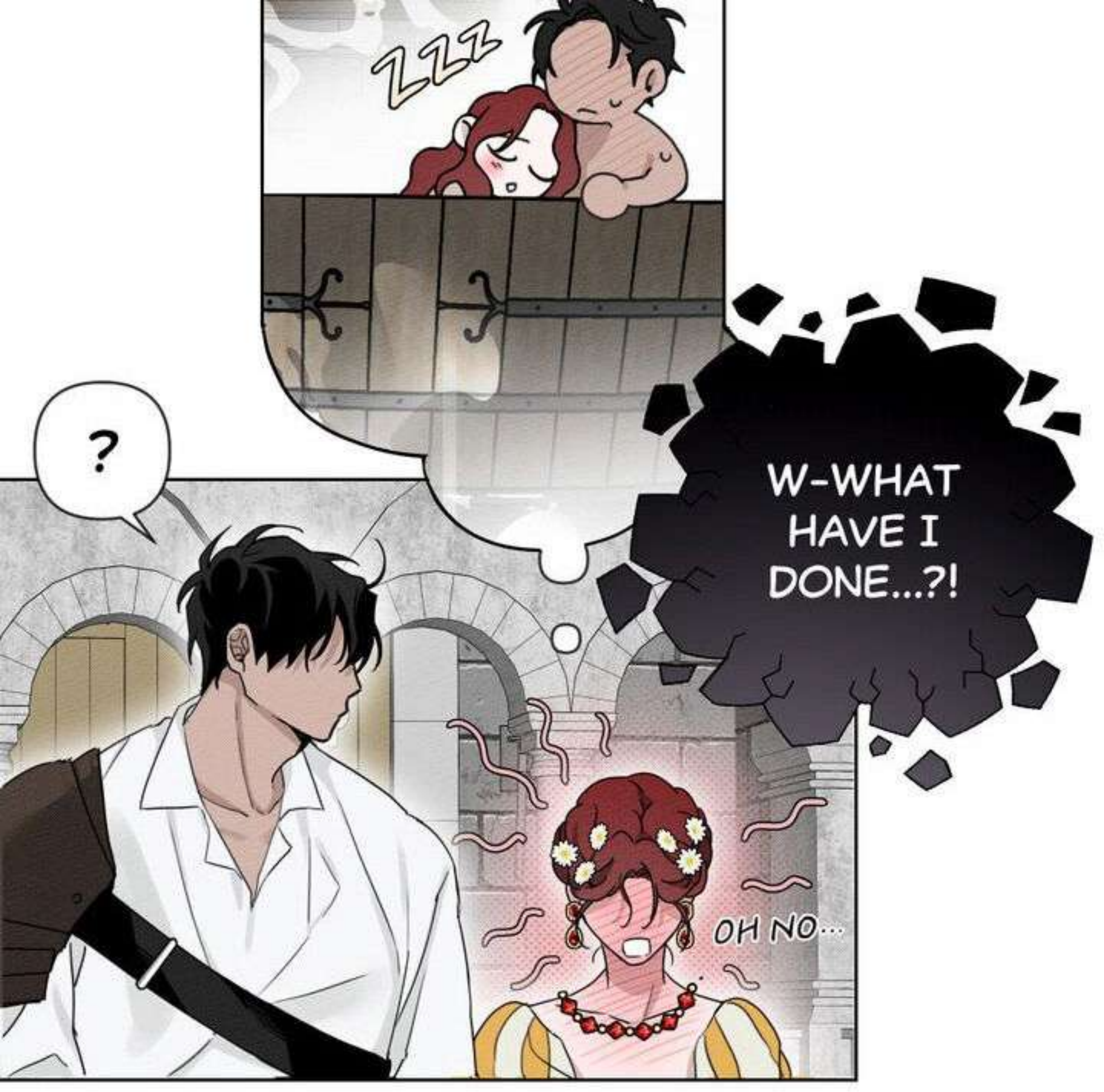


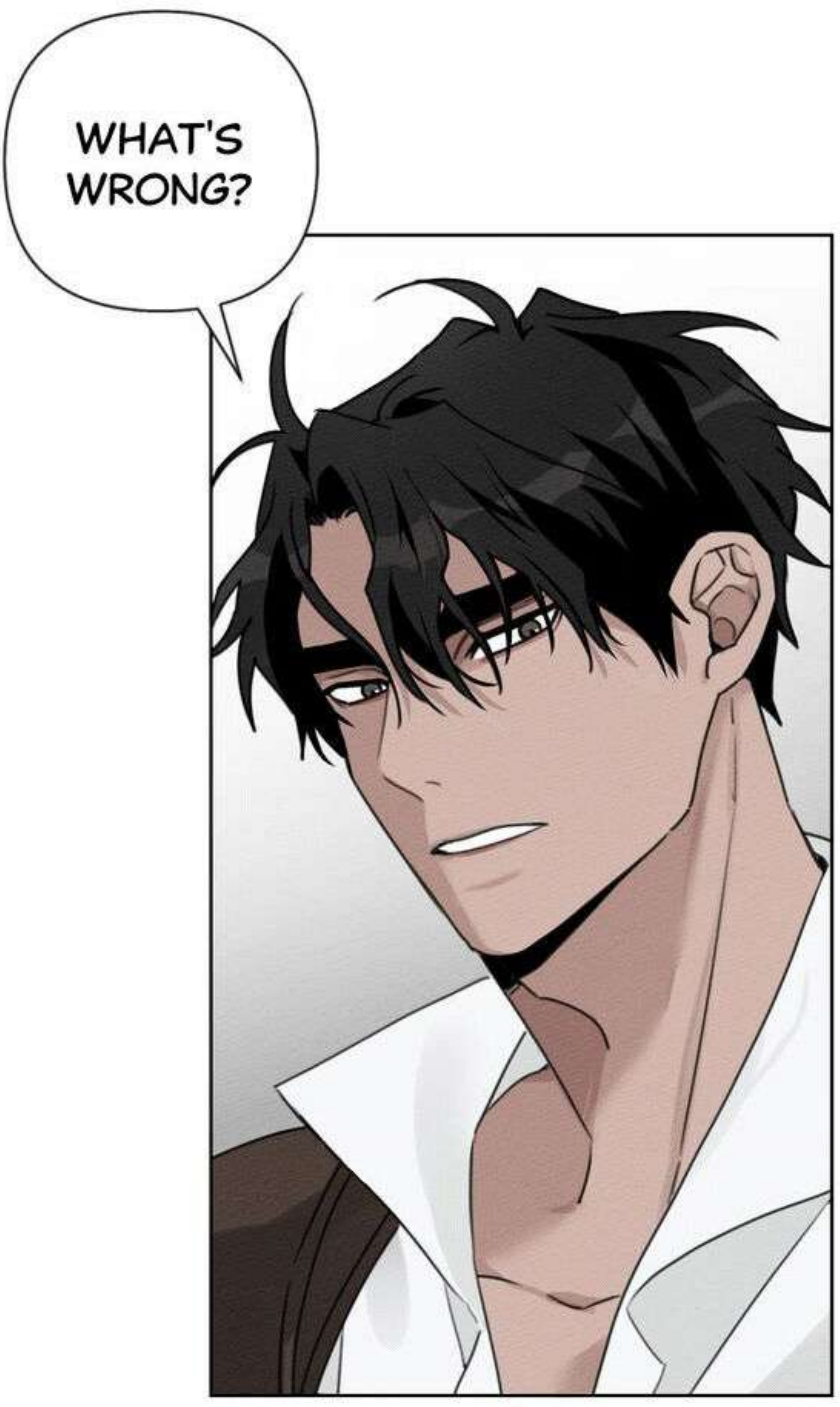


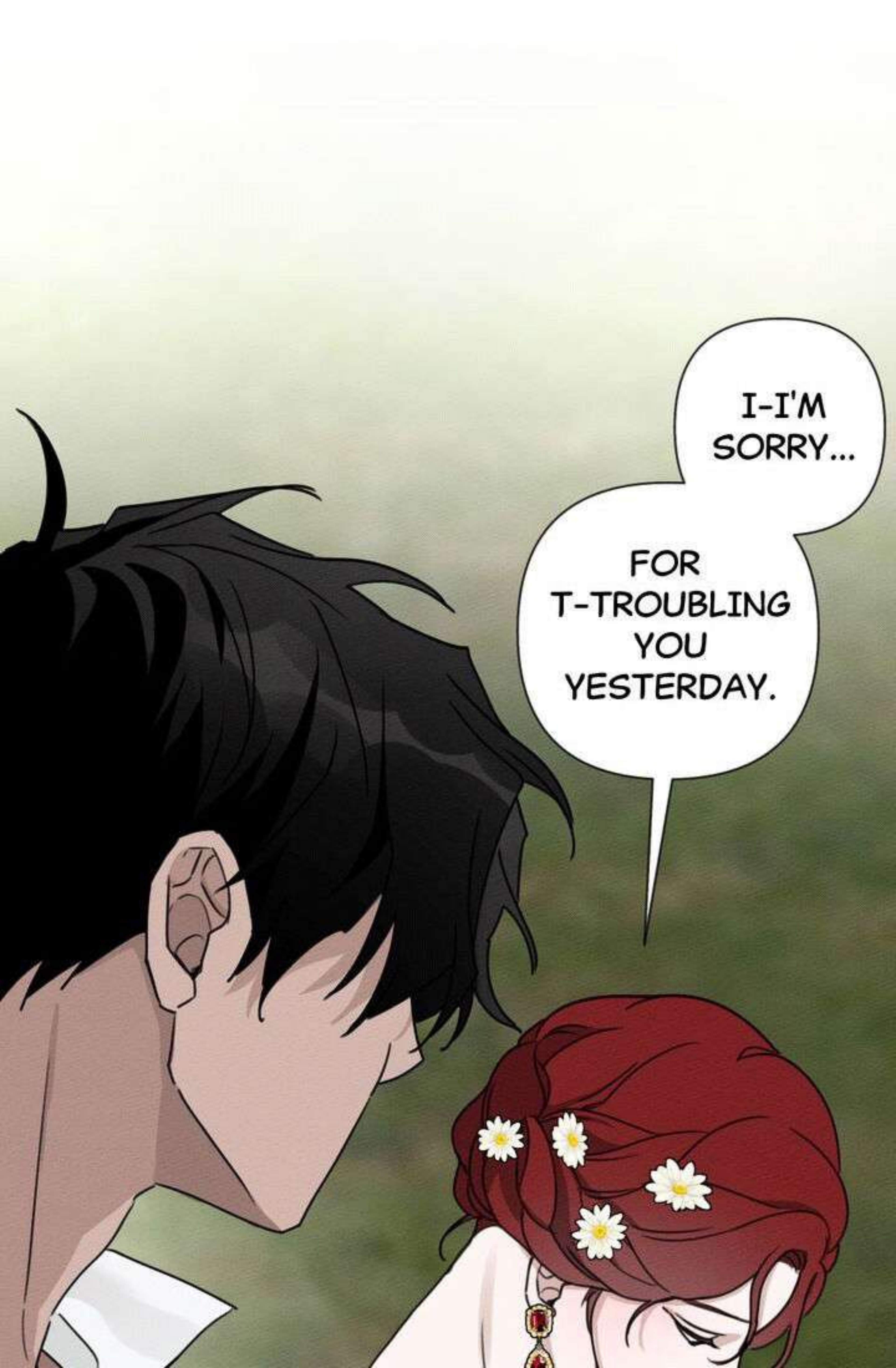
I COULDN'T HELP
BUT NOTICE -

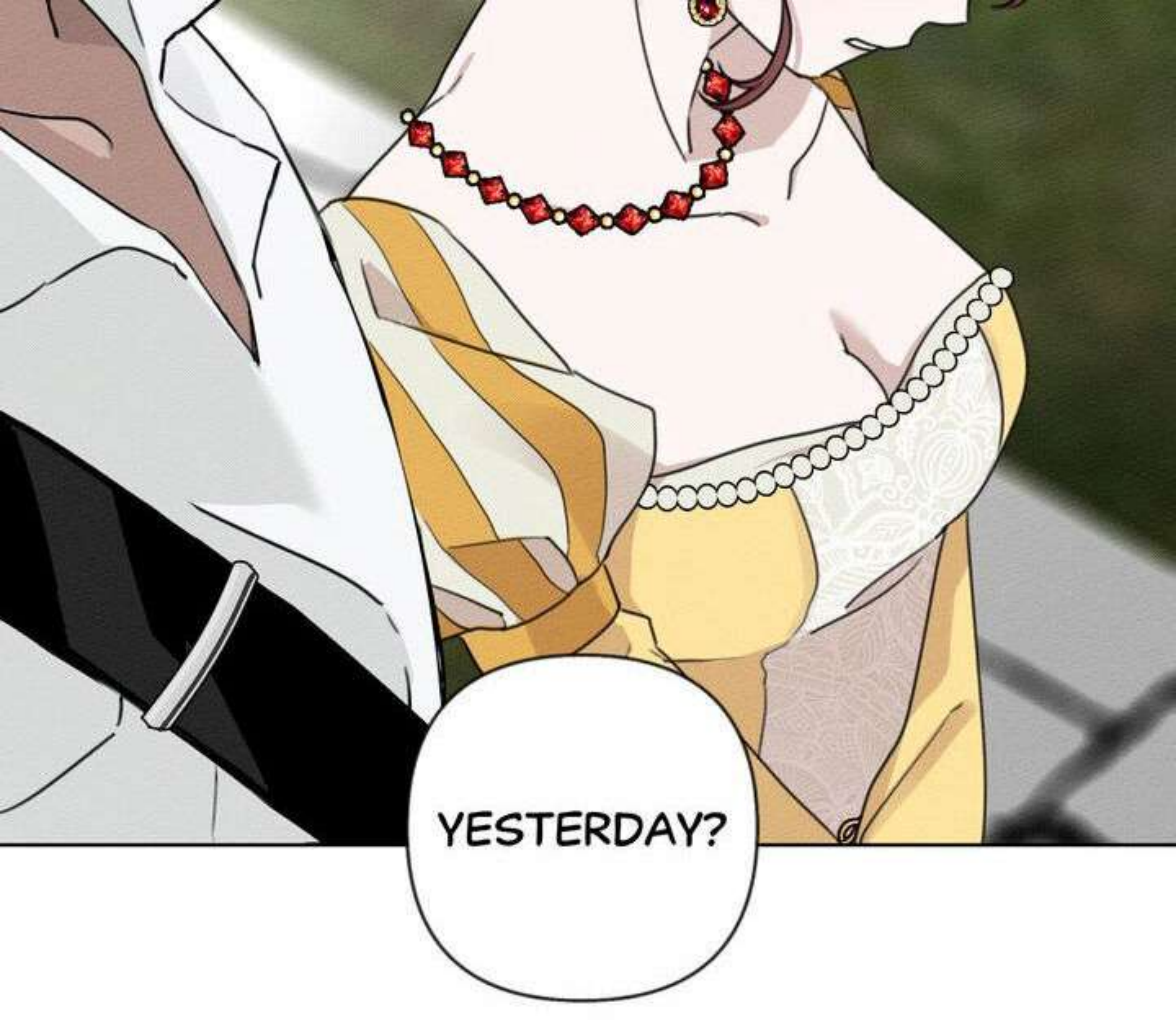

RIFTAN'S HANDS ARE SO BIG. ESPECIALLY YESTERDAY...

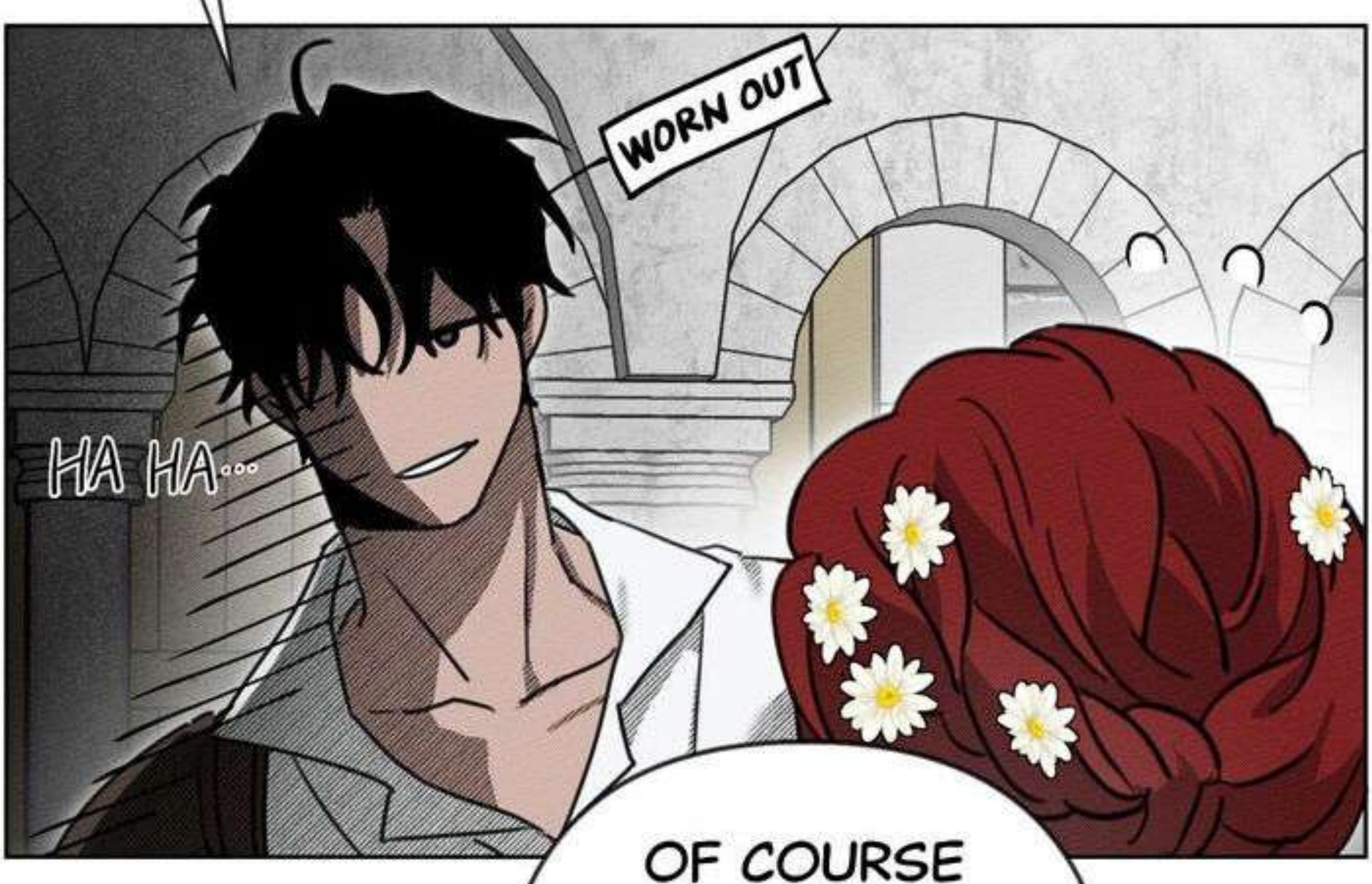


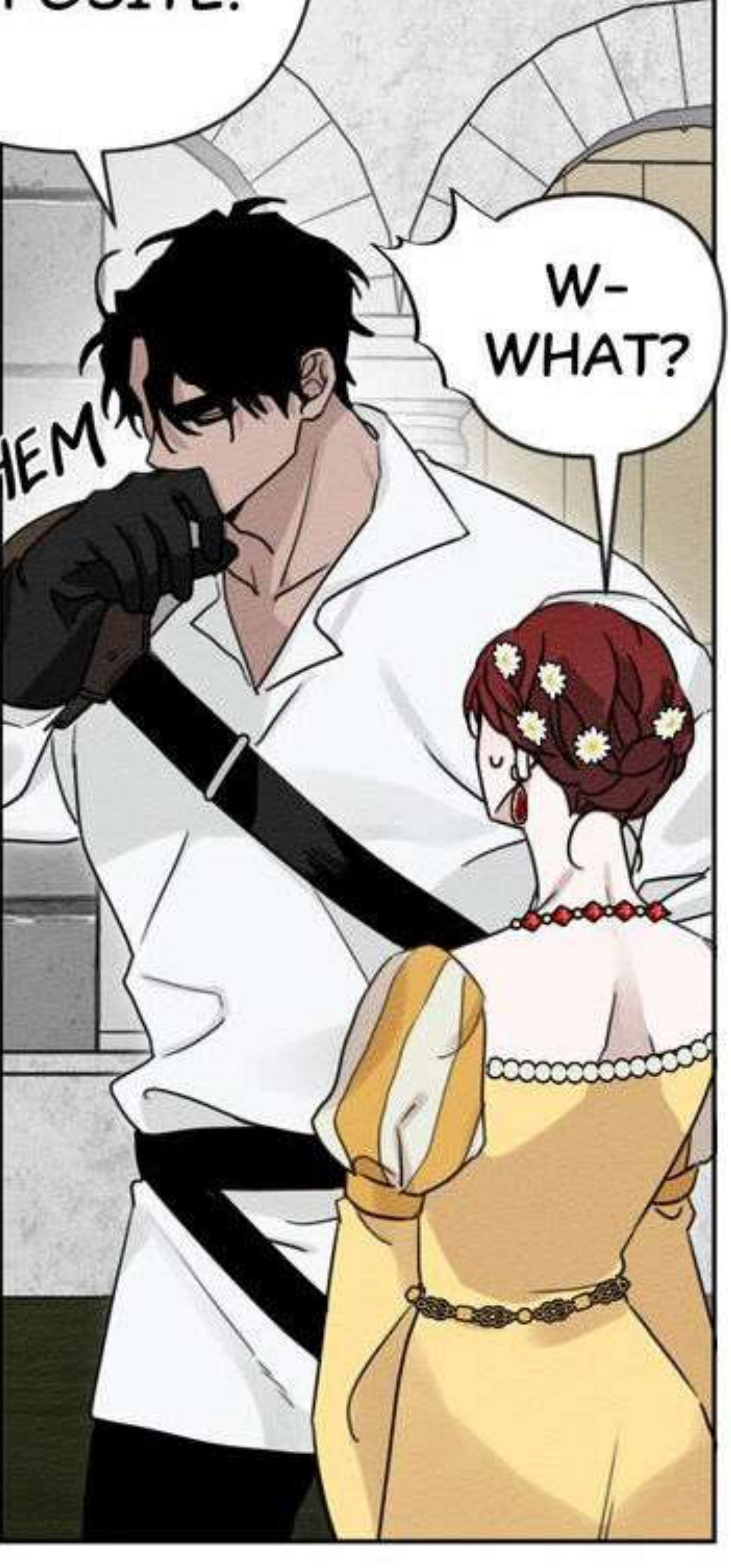

ZZZ
?
W-WHAT HAVE I DONE...?!
OH NO...

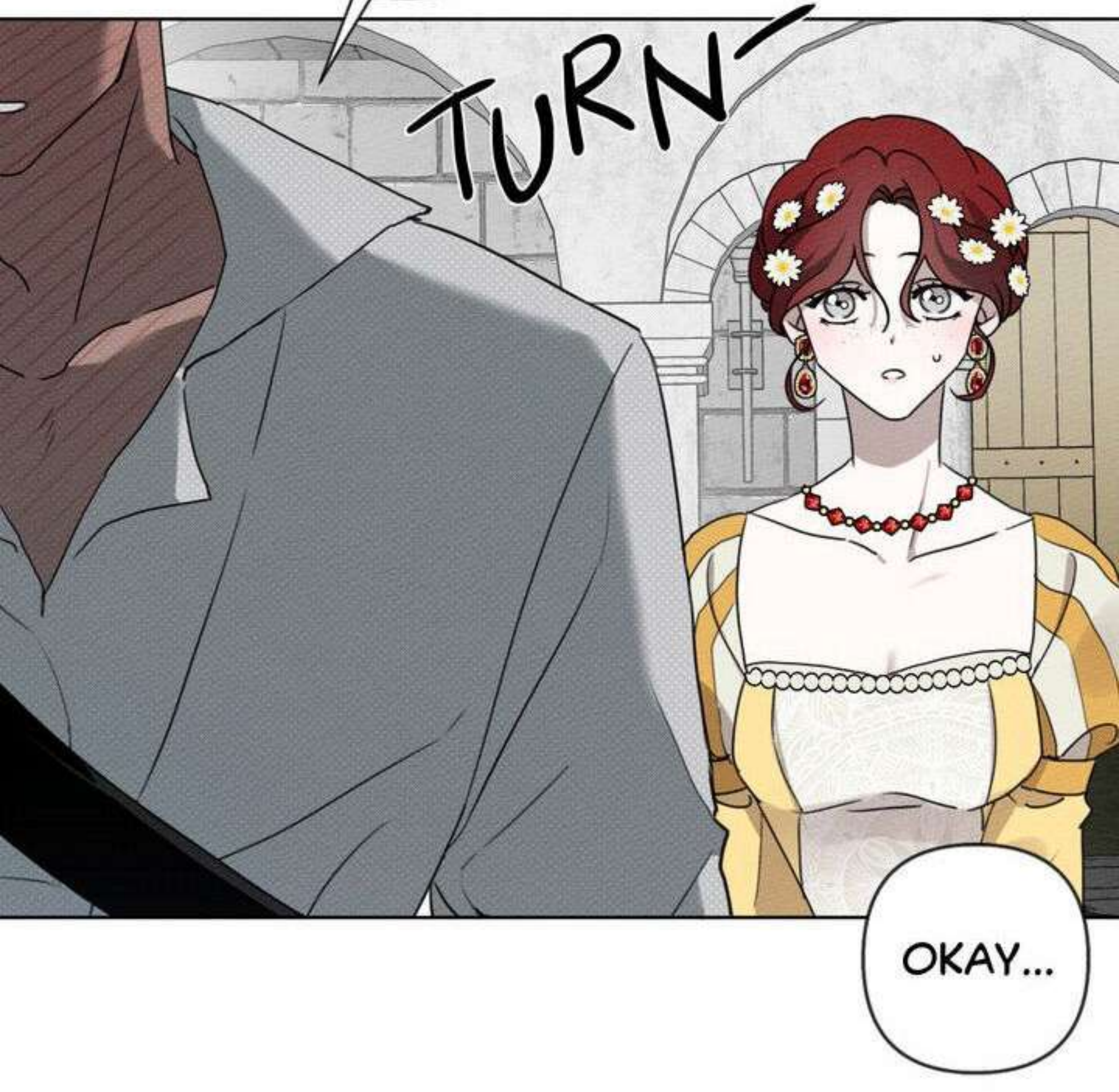

WHAT'S WRONG?


I-I'M SORRY...
FOR T-TROUBLING YOU YESTERDAY.


YESTERDAY?
F-FOR FALLING ASLEEP LIKE TH-THAT...
OH... IT'S FINE.


WORN OUT
HA HA
OF COURSE YOU'D BE TIRED AFTER WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
S-STILL, YOU MUST HAVE BEEN T-TIRED TOO... B-BUT YOU HAD TO T-TAKE CARE OF M-ME...


TIRED...? HA. QUITE THE OPPOSITE.
AHEM
W-WHAT?
... NOTHING.
LET'S GO.

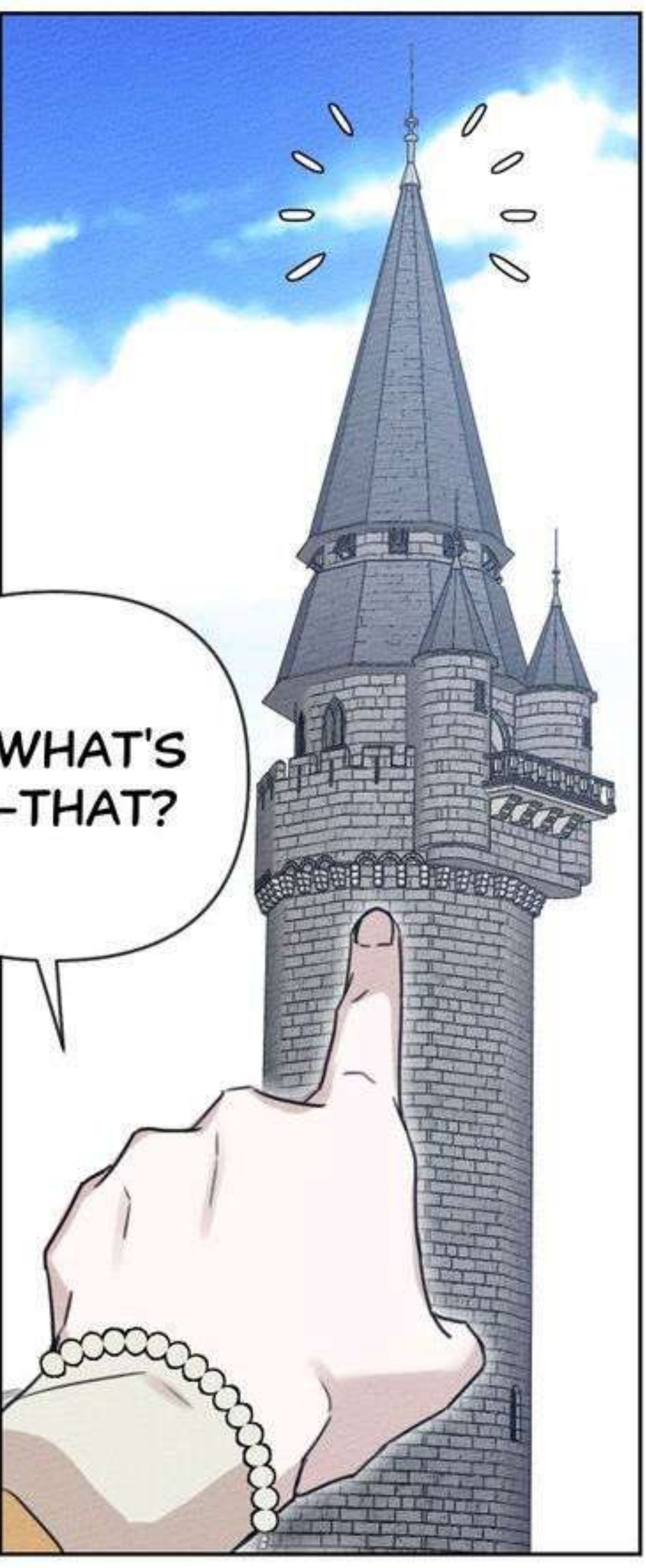

TURN—
OKAY...

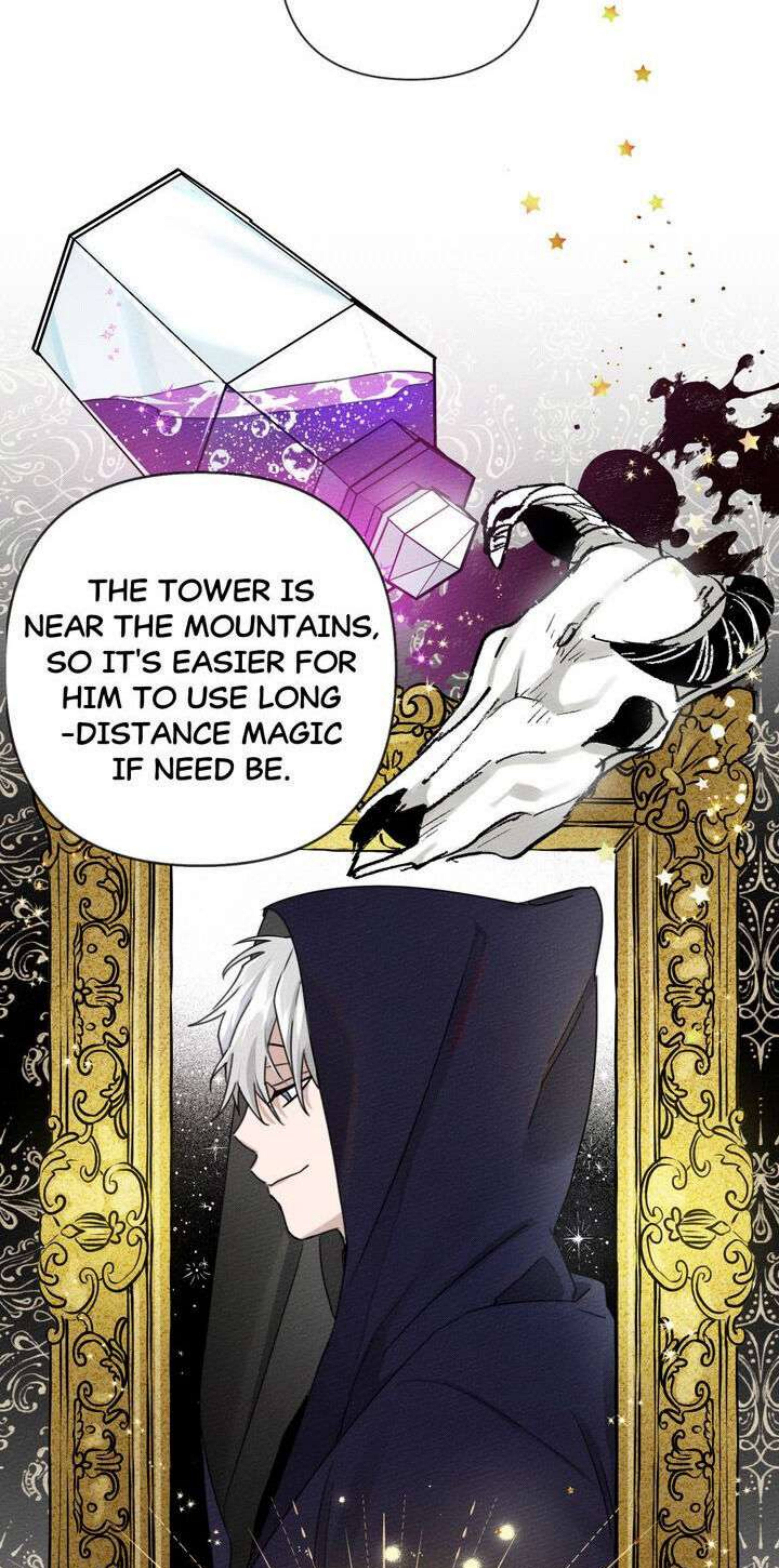
THE SENTRIES WALK AROUND

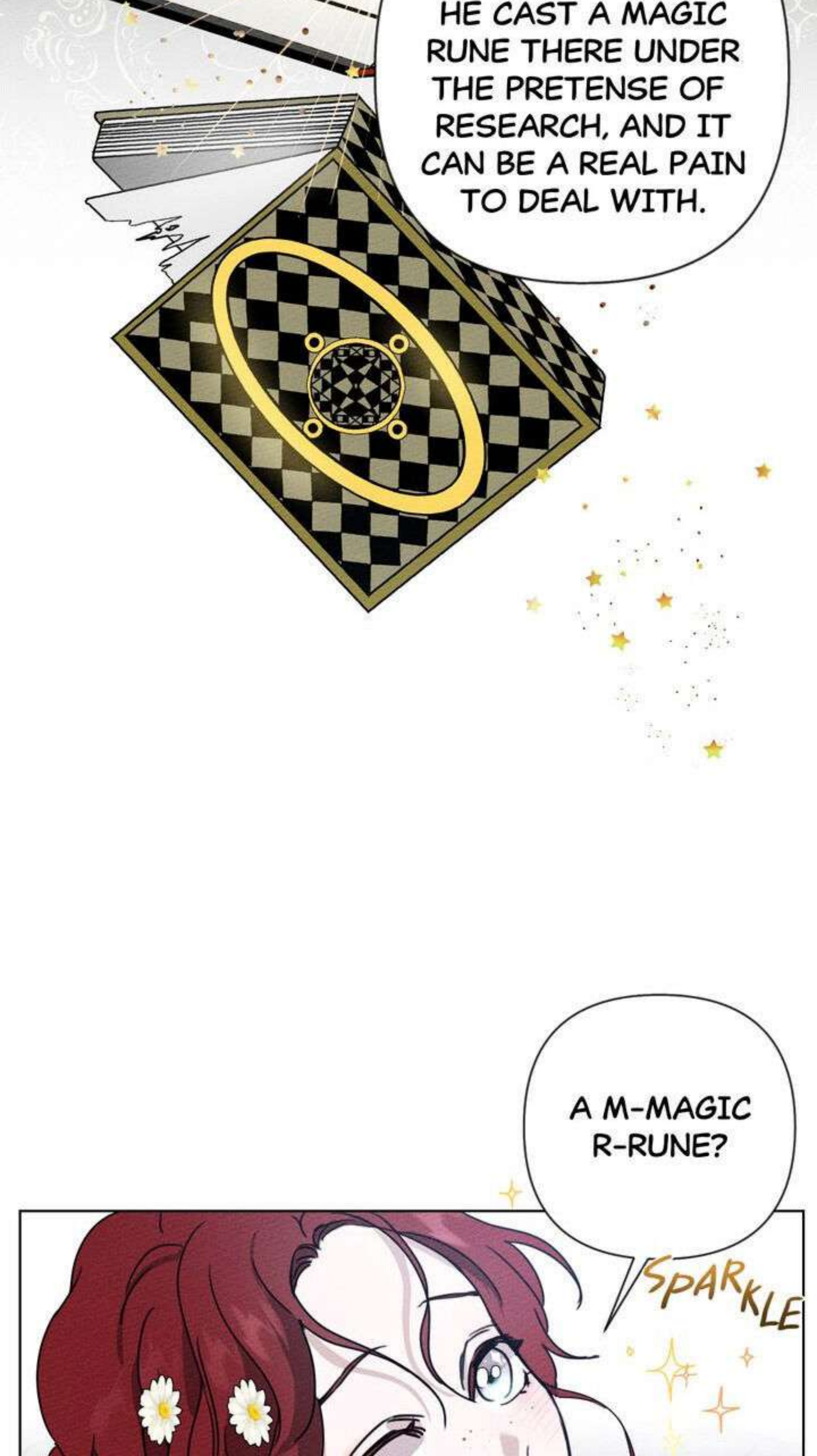
THE RAMPARTS TO PATROL THE CASTLE EVERY DAY.
THEY ALSO KEEP WATCH FROM THE WATCHTOWERS.
THIS CASTLE

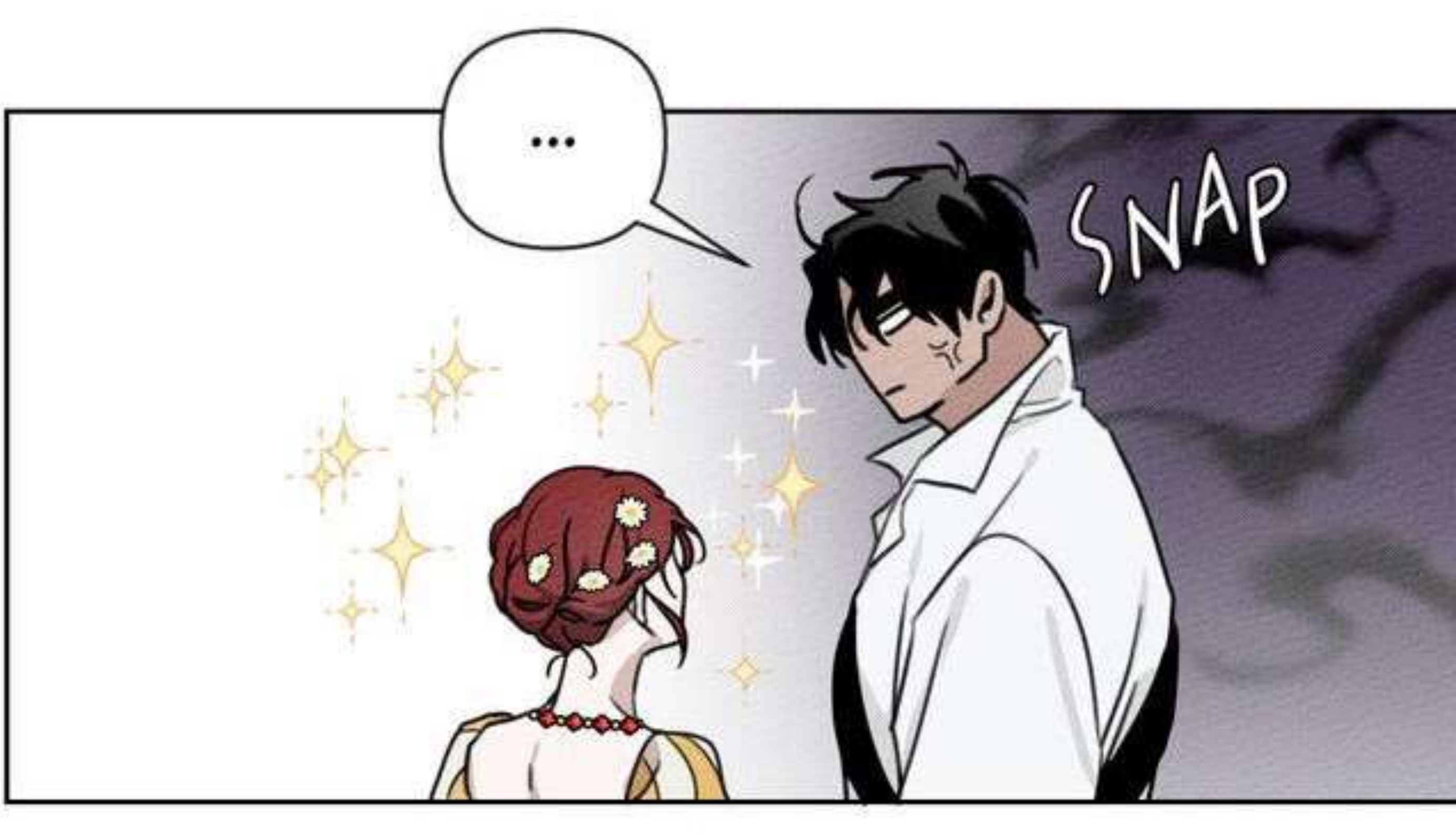
CAN WITHSTAND ANY ATTACK.

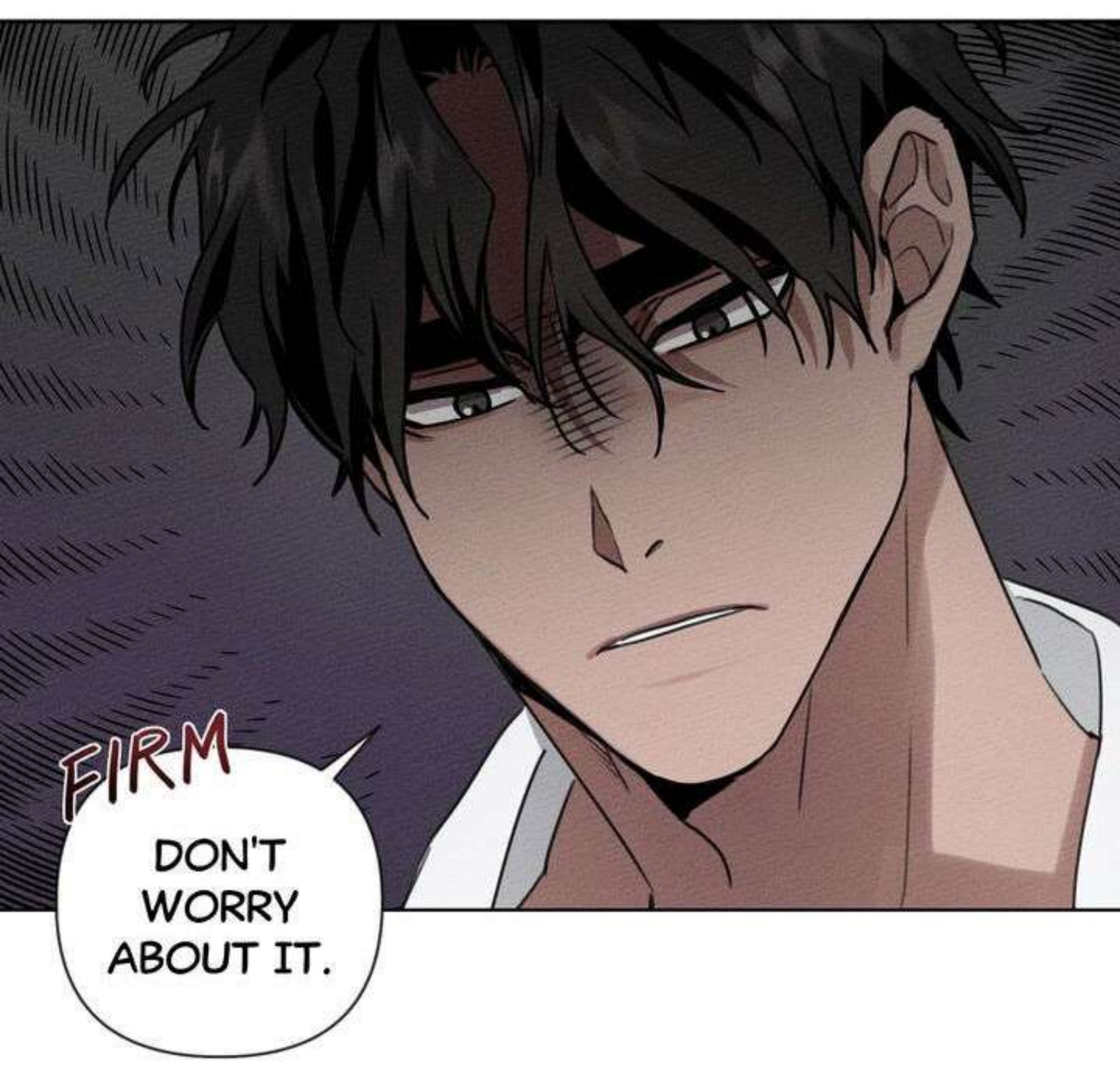
...!

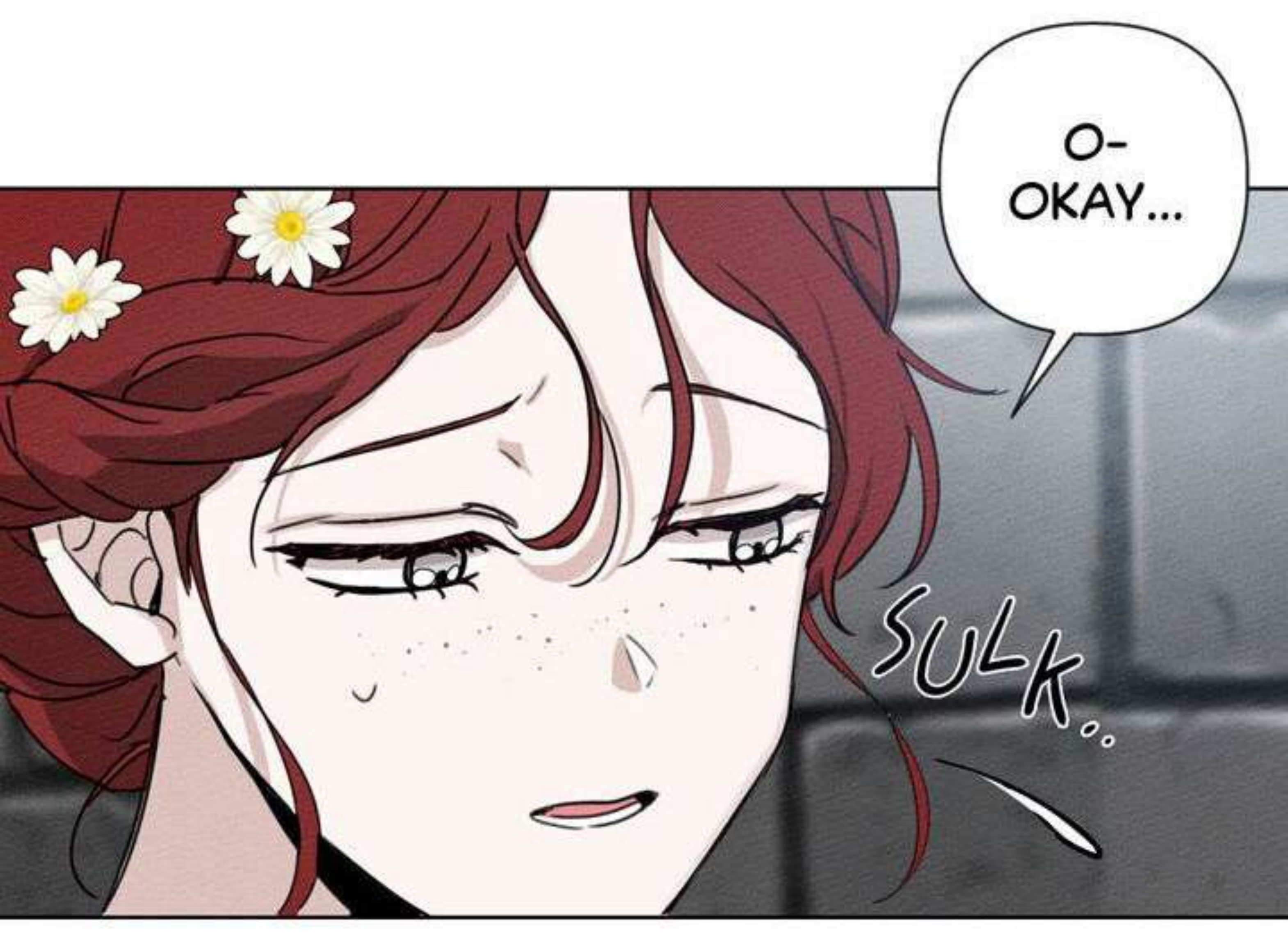

W-WHAT'S TH-THAT?
THAT'S WHERE RUTH LIVES.

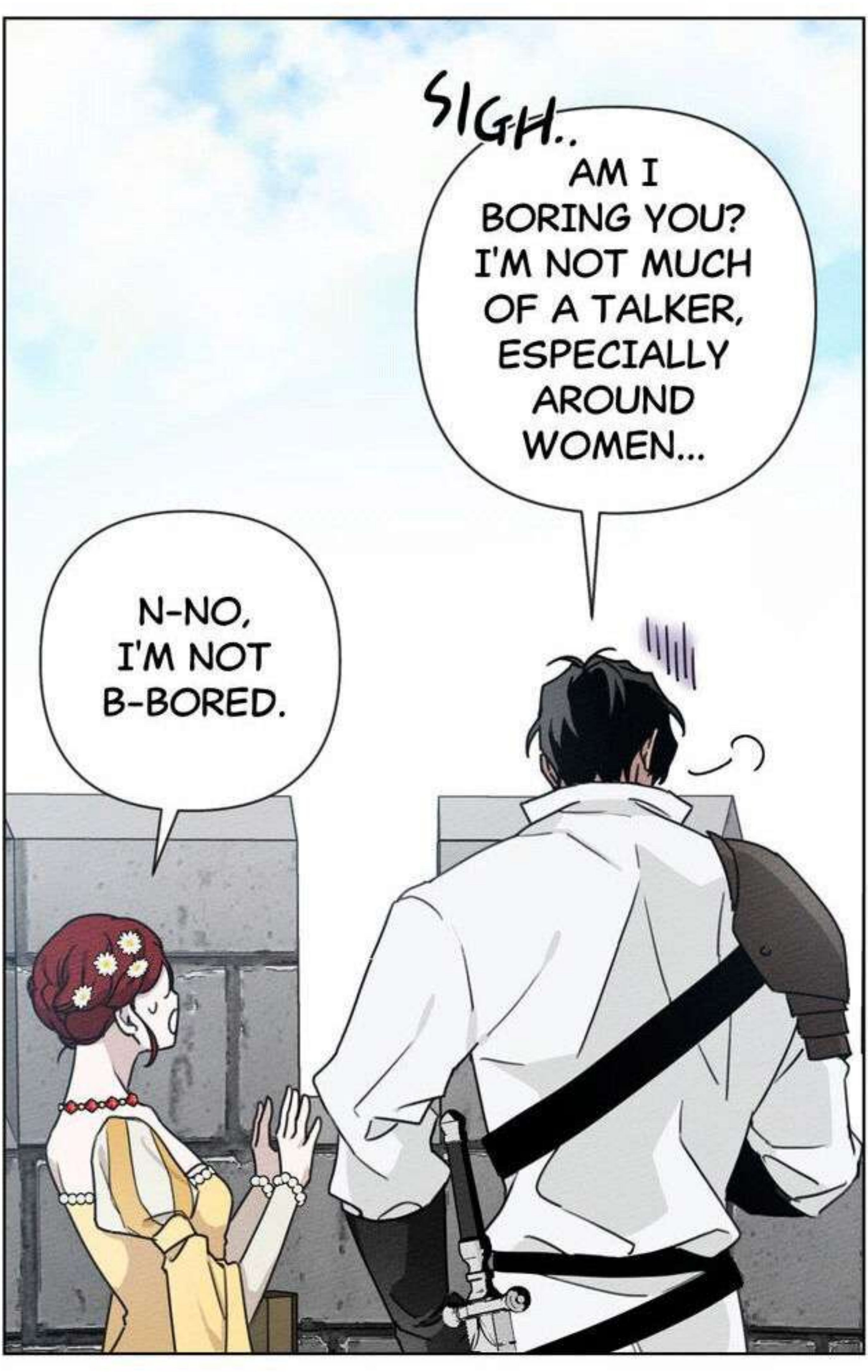

THE TOWER IS NEAR THE MOUNTAINS, SO IT'S EASIER FOR HIM TO USE LONG-DISTANCE MAGIC IF NEED BE.
BUT TRY TO STAY AWAY. HE CAST A MAGIC RUNE THERE UNDER THE PRETENSE OF RESEARCH, AND IT CAN BE A REAL PAIN TO DEAL WITH.

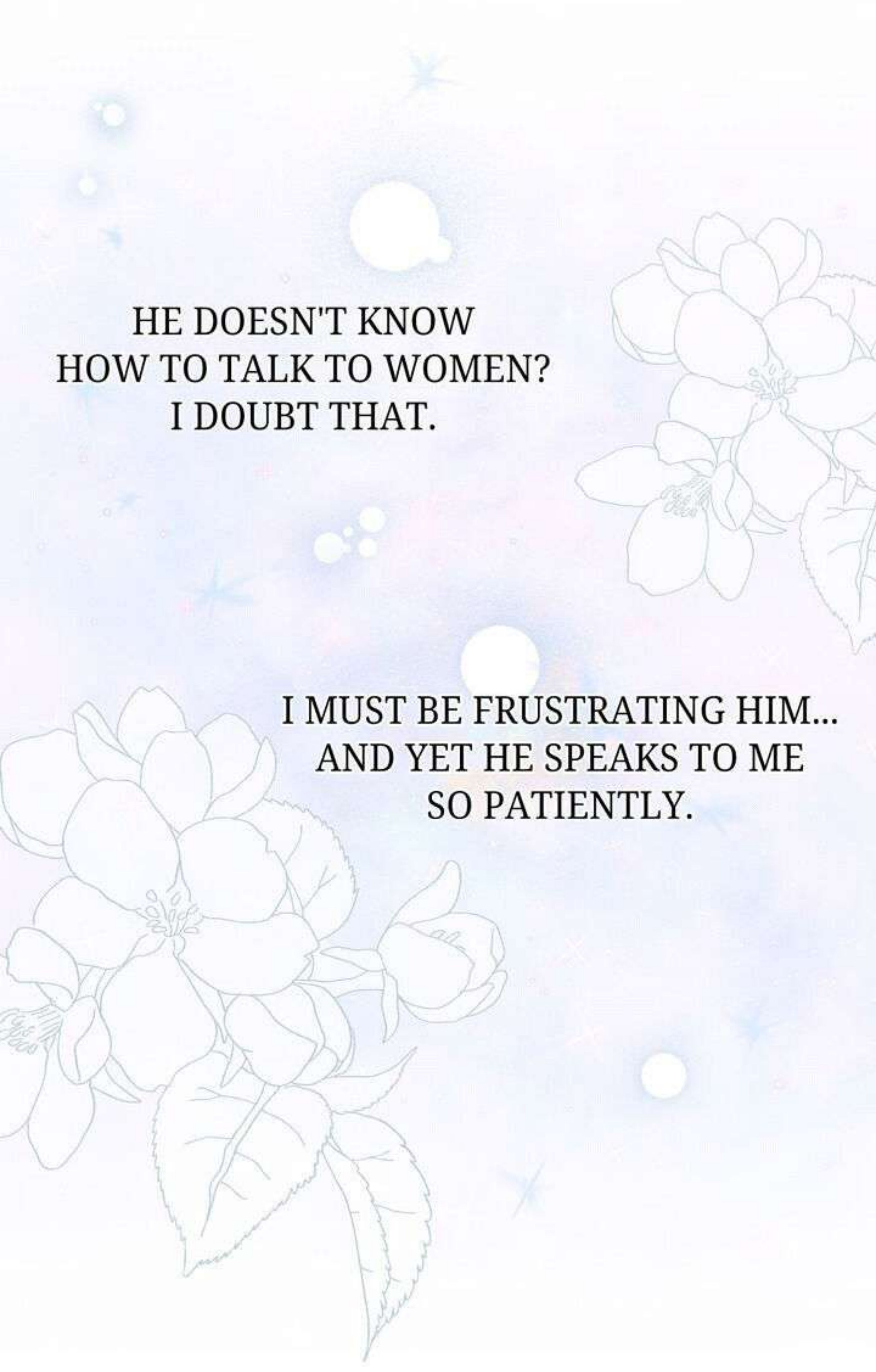

A M-MAGIC R-RUNE?
SPARKLE

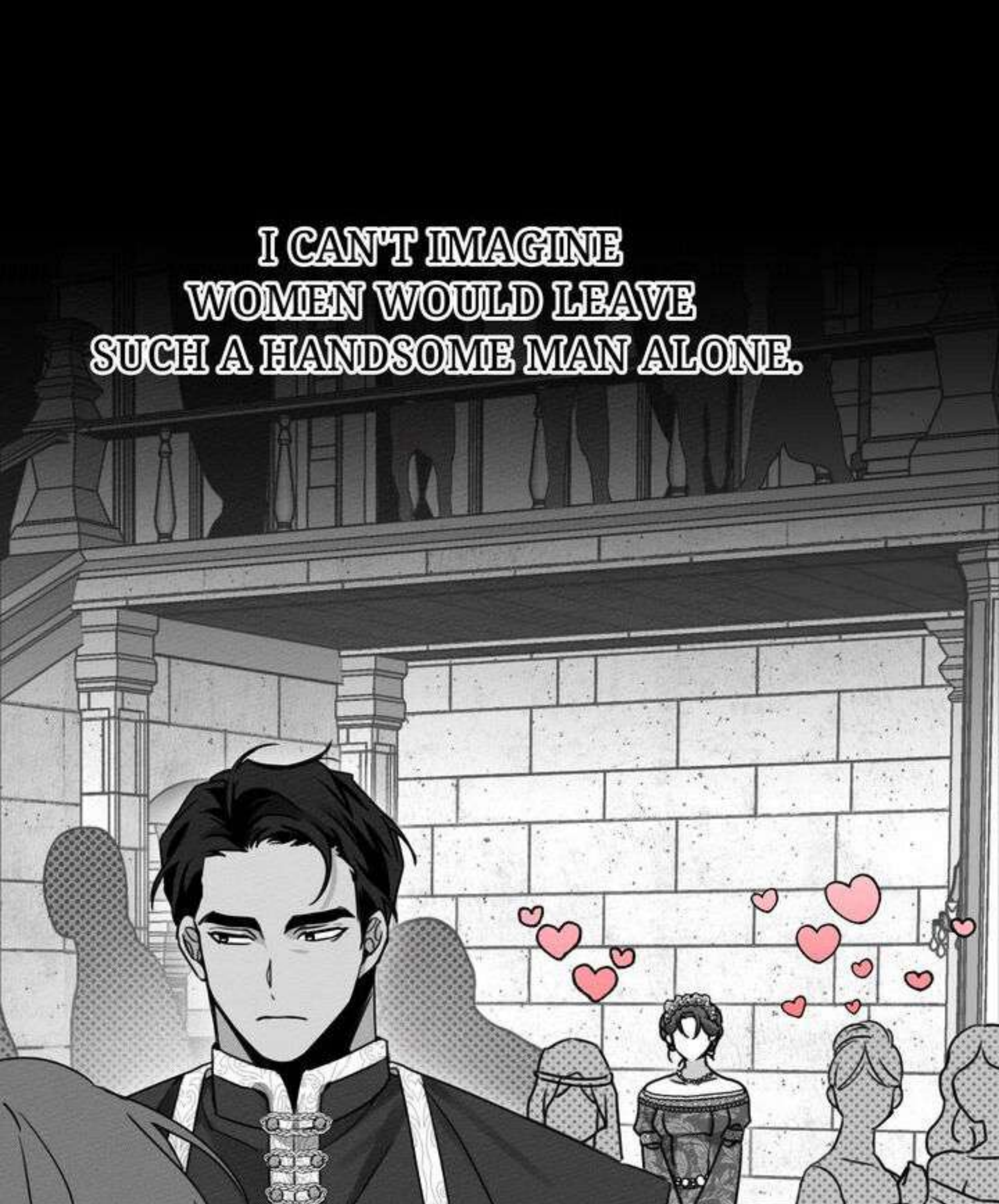

...
SNAP


FIRM
DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.


O-OKAY...
SULK..


SIGH..
AM I BORING YOU? I'M NOT MUCH OF A TALKER, ESPECIALLY AROUND WOMEN...
N-NO, I'M NOT B-BORED.

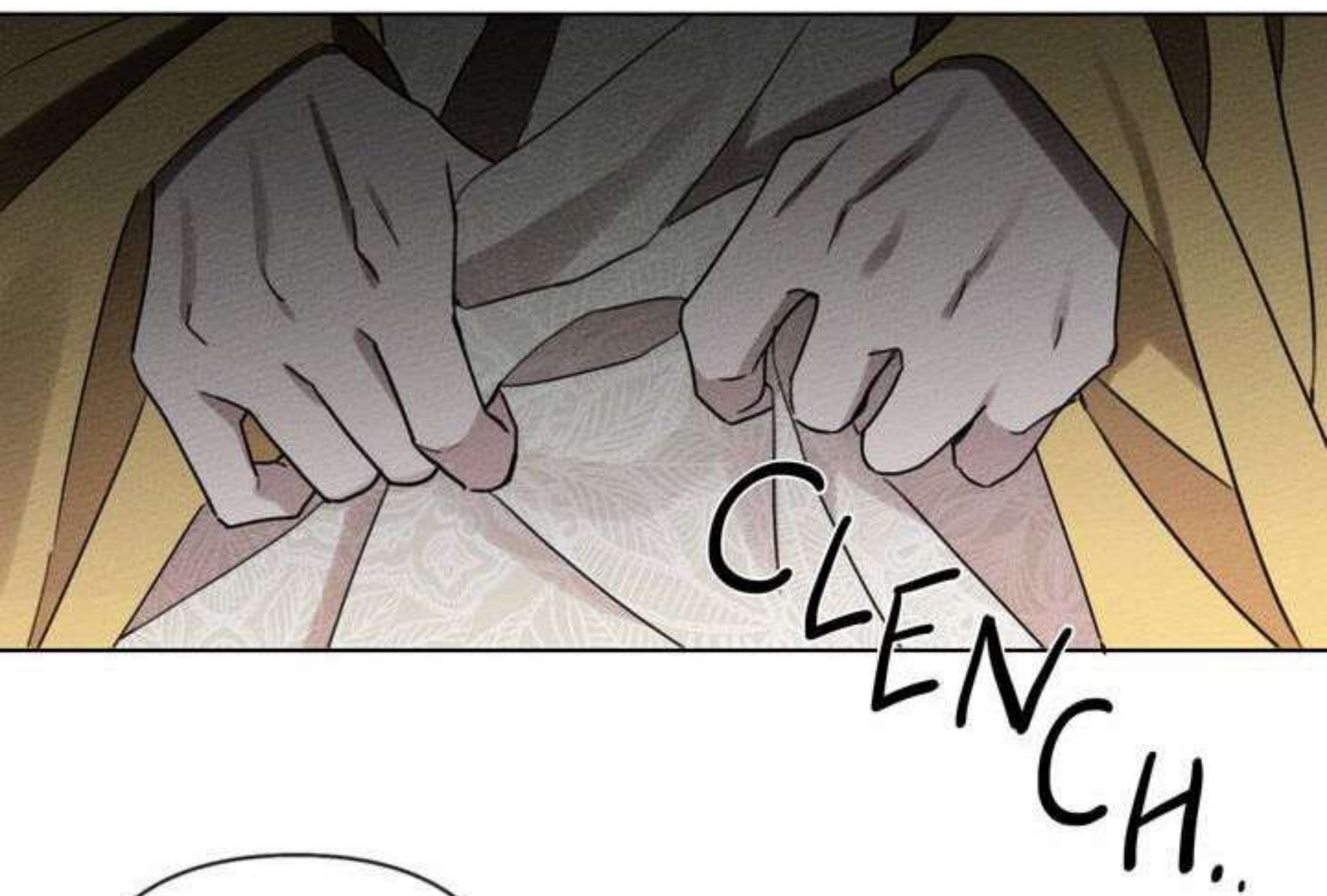

HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO TALK TO WOMEN? I DOUBT THAT.
I MUST BE FRUSTRATING HIM... AND YET HE SPEAKS TO ME SO PATIENTLY.

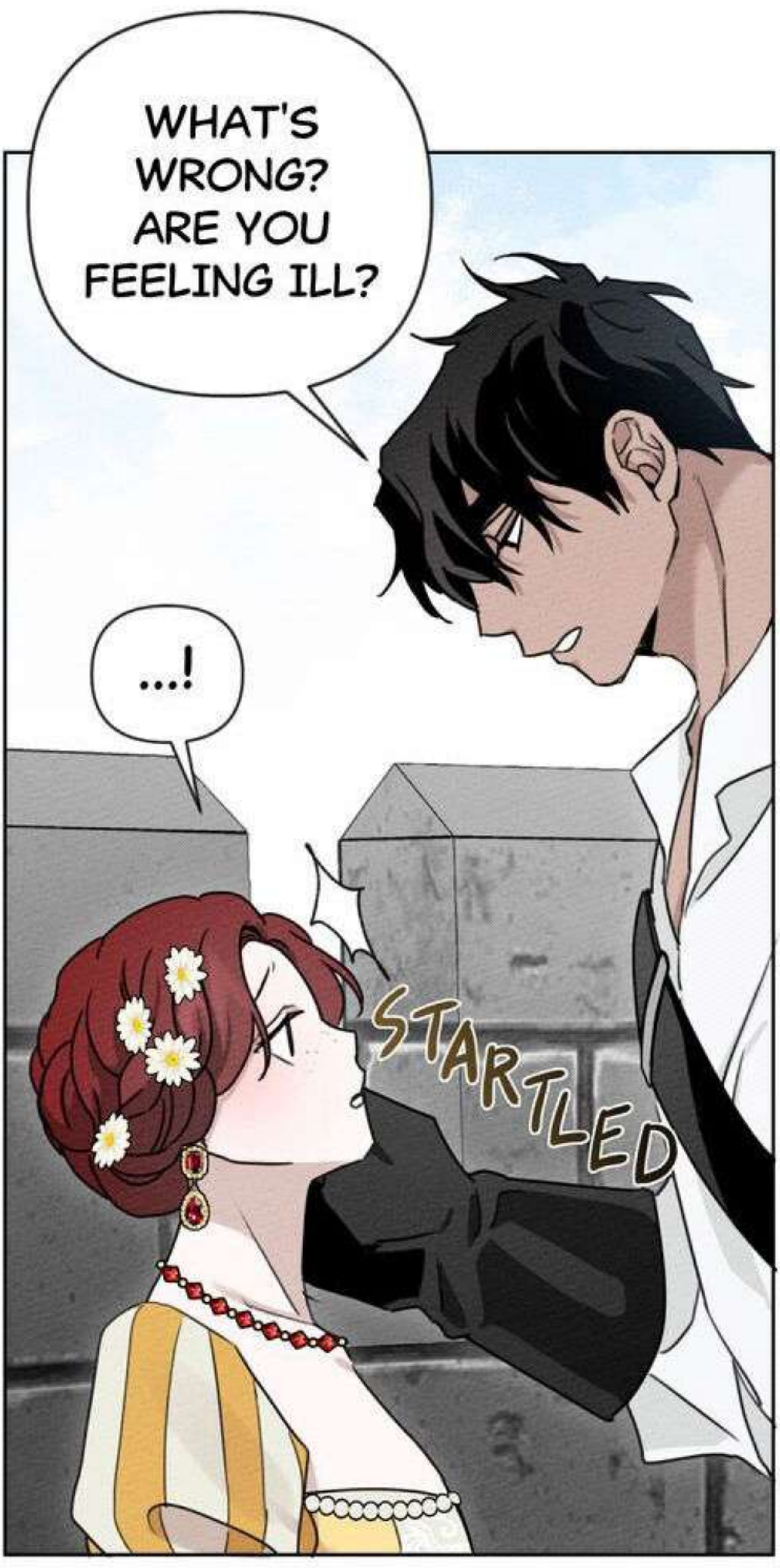

I CAN'T IMAGINE
WOMEN WOULD LEAVE
SUCH A HANDSOME MAN ALONE.

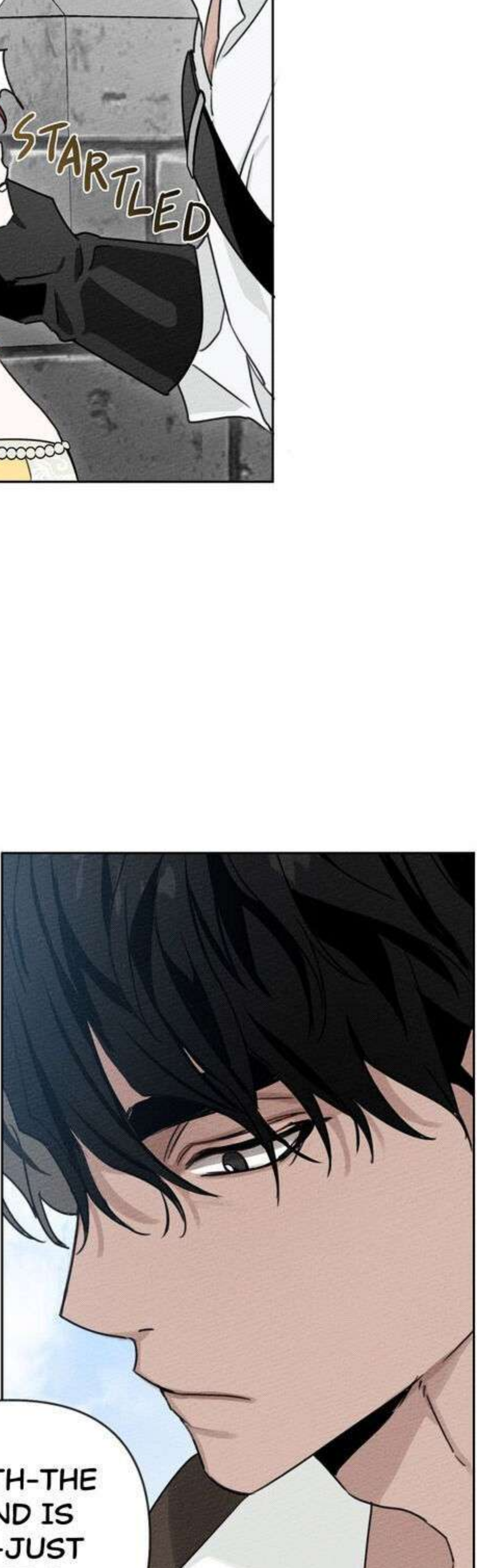
EVERYONE
AT CROYSO CASTLE
ALWAYS WHISPERED
ABOUT HIS GOOD LOOKS.

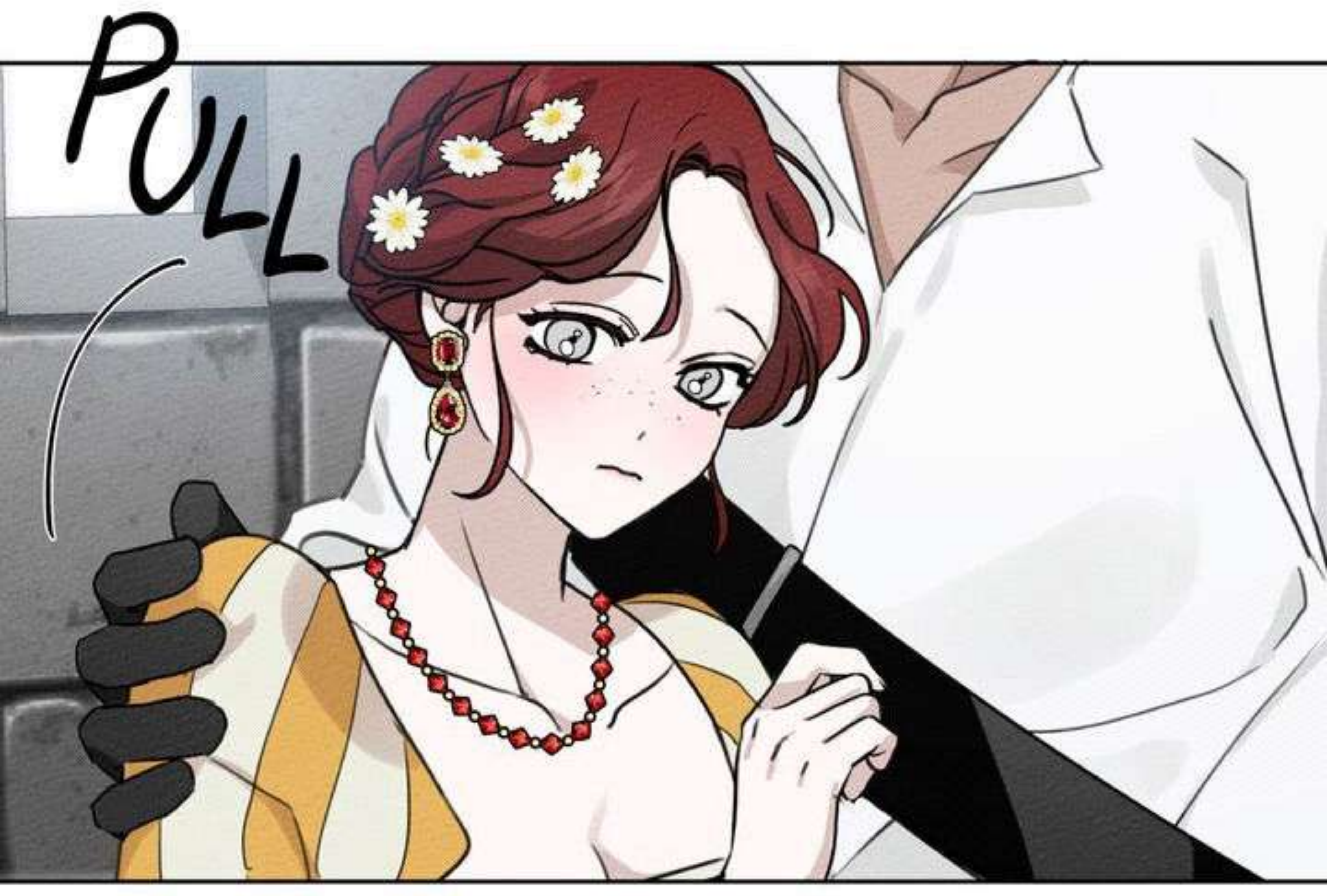
I'M SURE

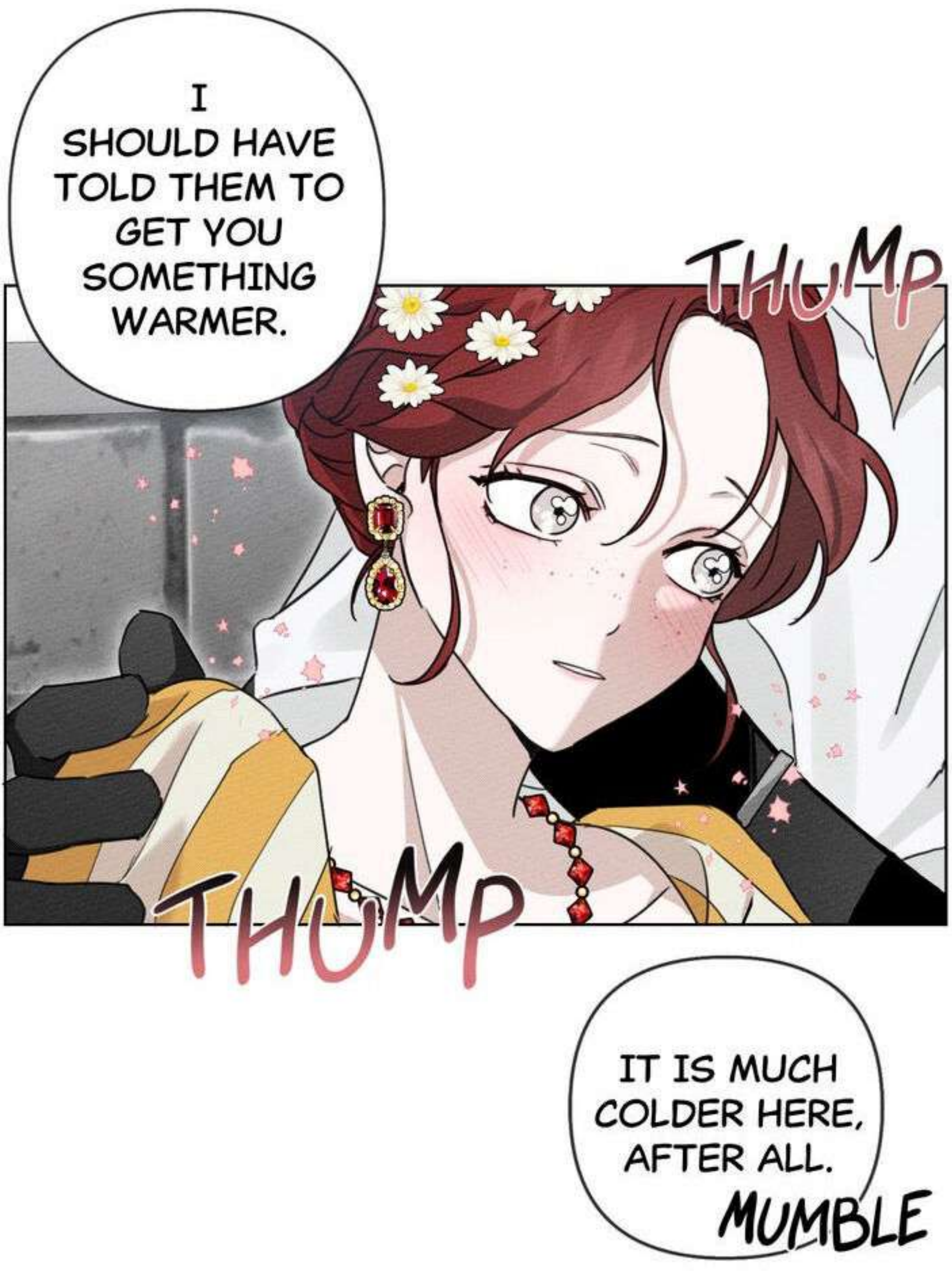
HE HAS PLENTY OF
EXPERIENCE WITH WOMEN.

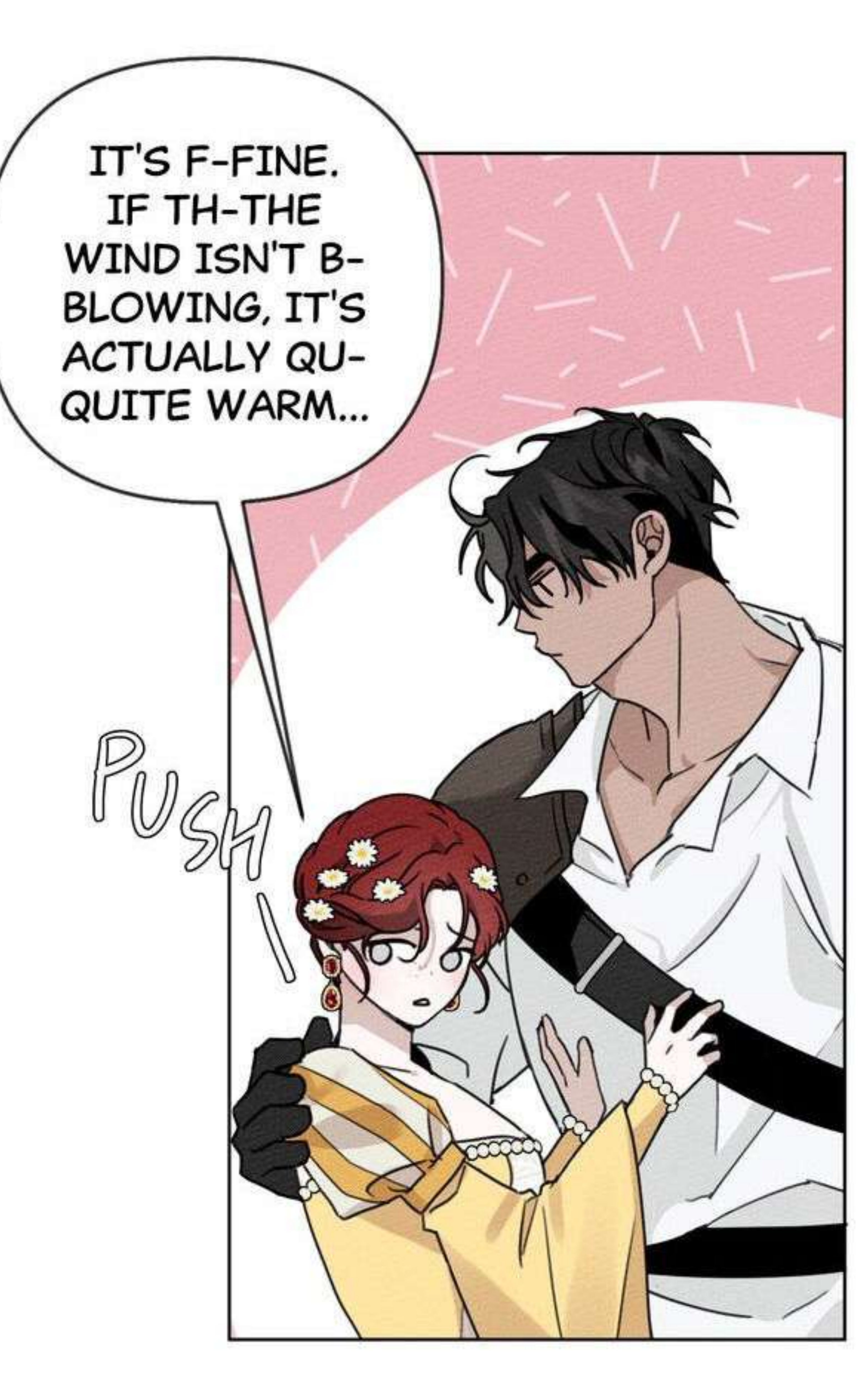

CLENCH..

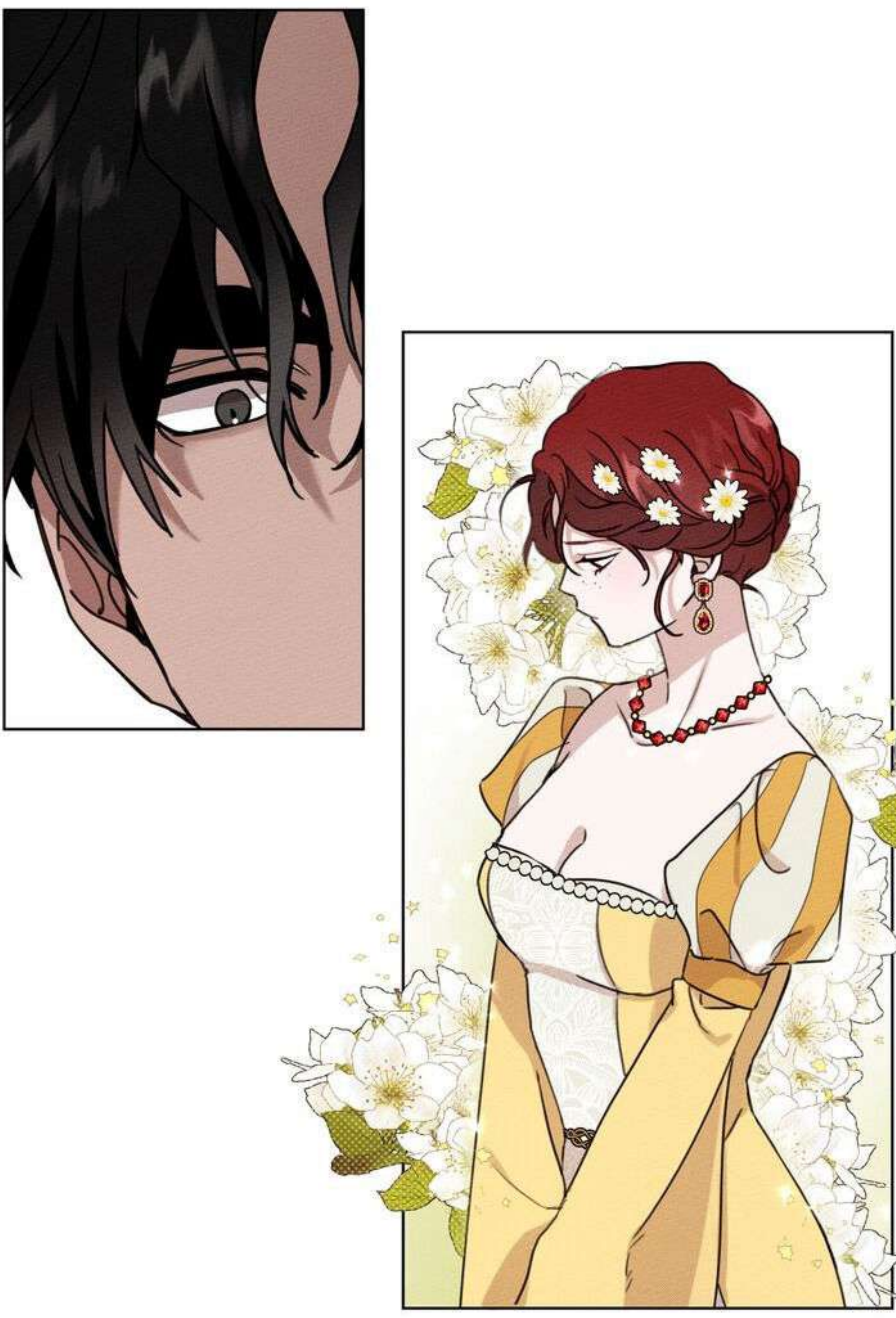

WHAT'S WRONG? ARE YOU FEELING ILL?
...!
STARTLED


OH, TH-THE WIND IS A J-JUST A BIT C-COLD...

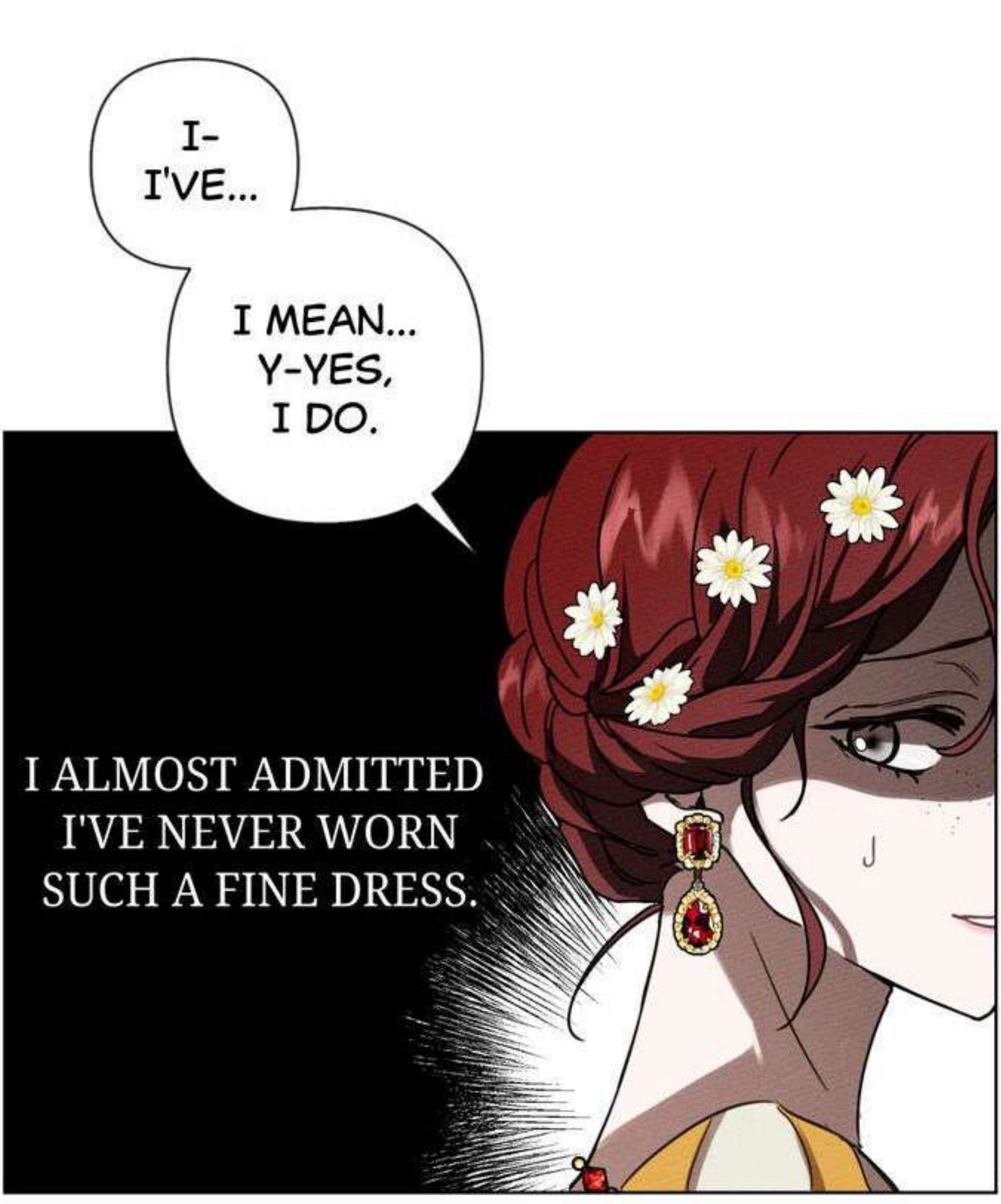

PULL


I SHOULD HAVE TOLD THEM TO GET YOU SOMETHING WARMER.
THUMP
THUMP
IT IS MUCH COLDER HERE, AFTER ALL.
MUMBLE

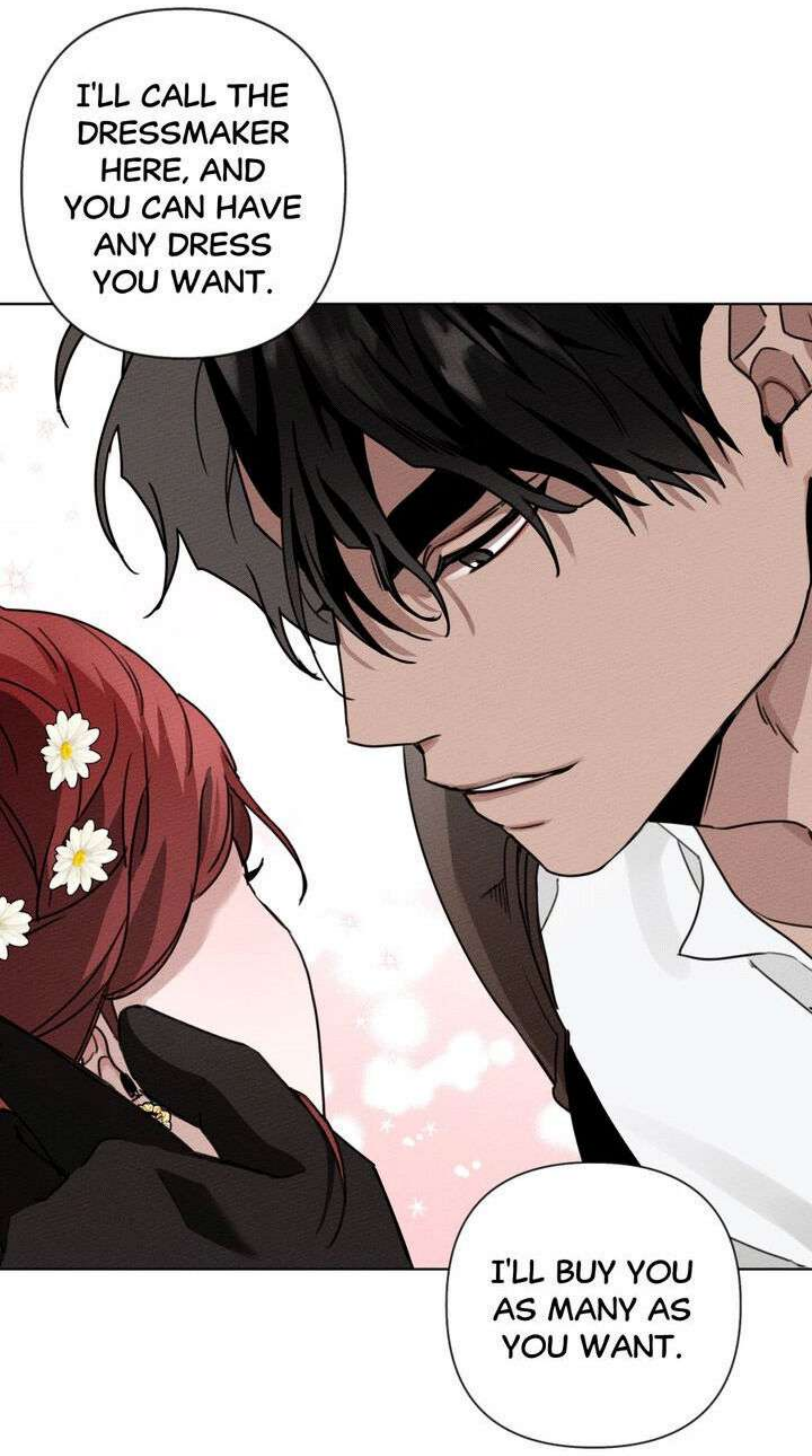

IT'S F-FINE. IF TH-THE WIND ISN'T B-BLOWING, IT'S ACTUALLY QU-QUITE WARM...
PUSH

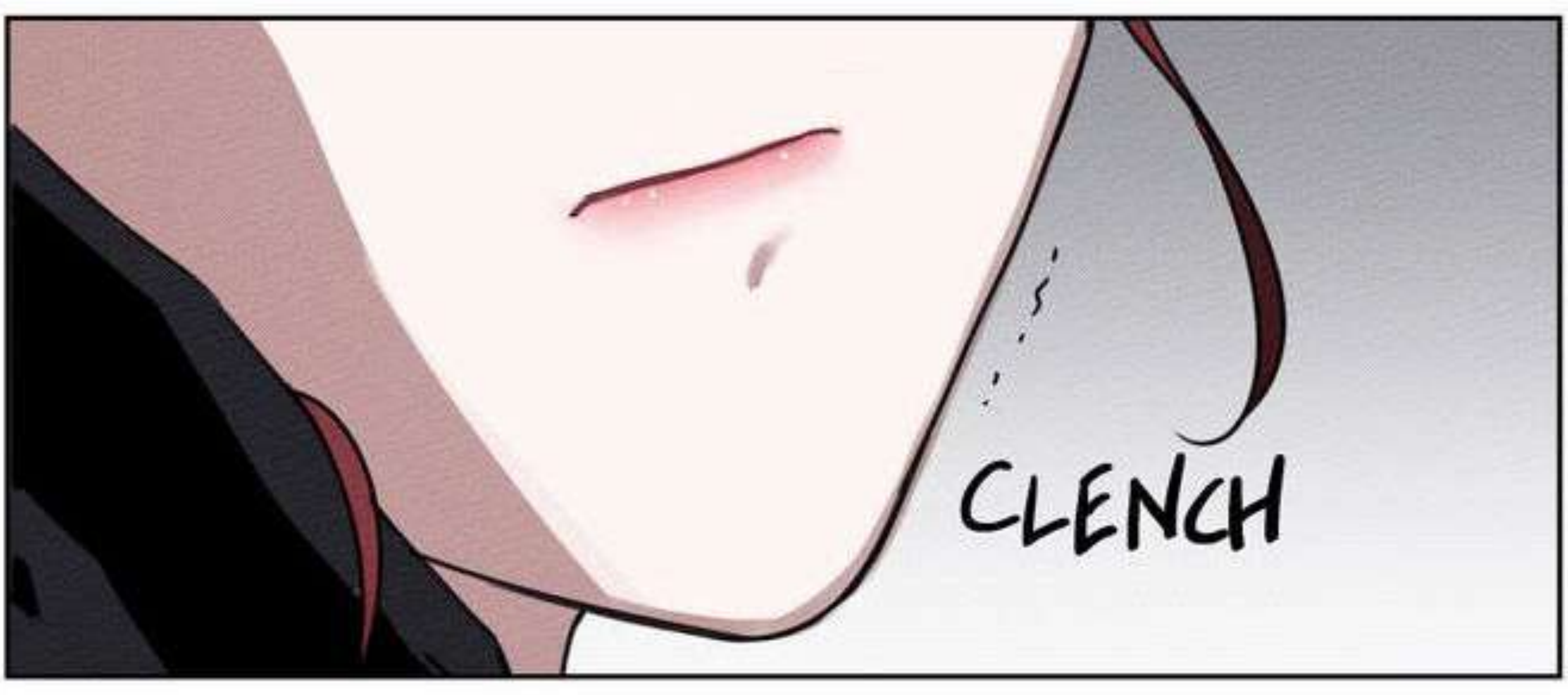


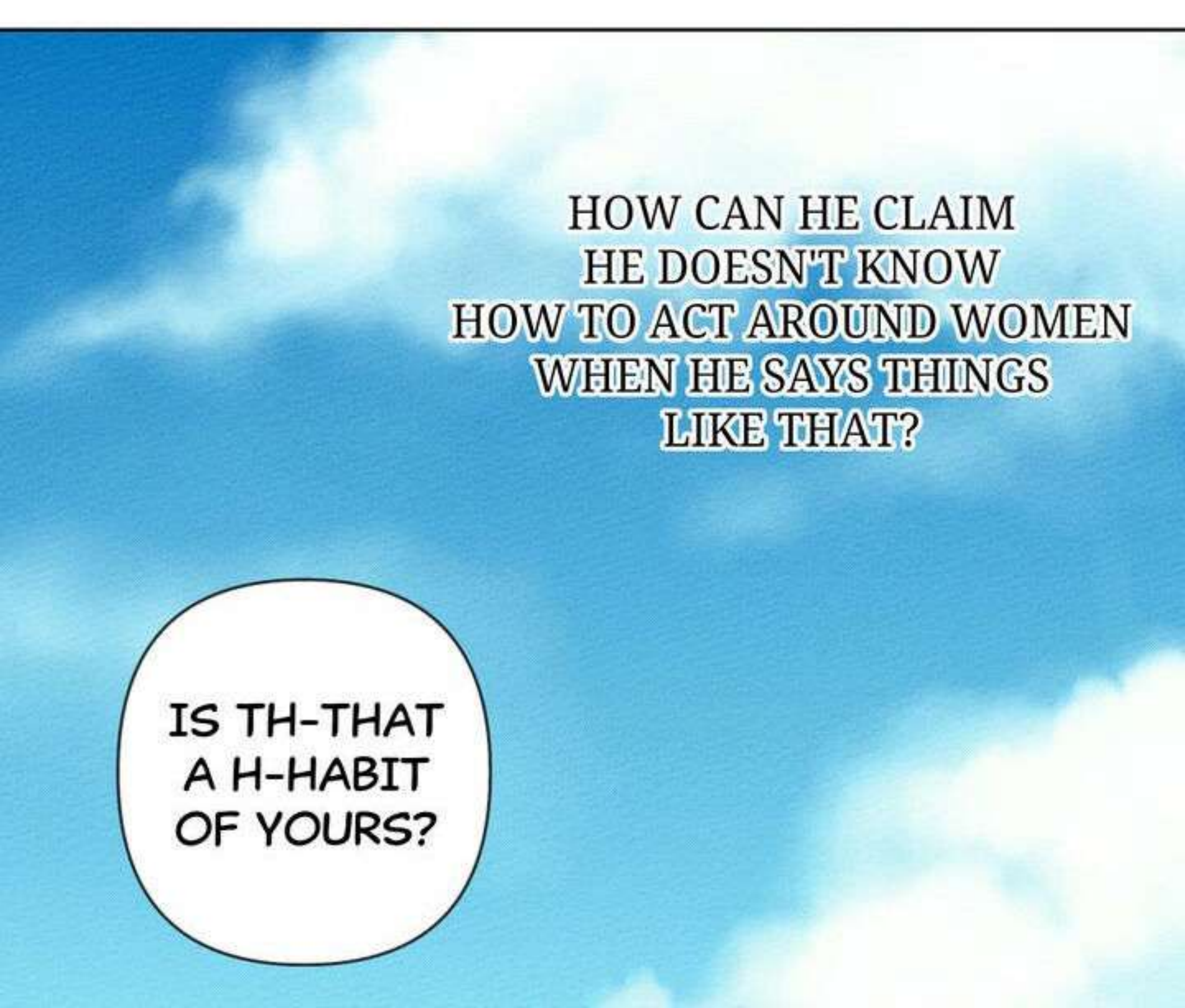
DO YOU LIKE THE DRESS?



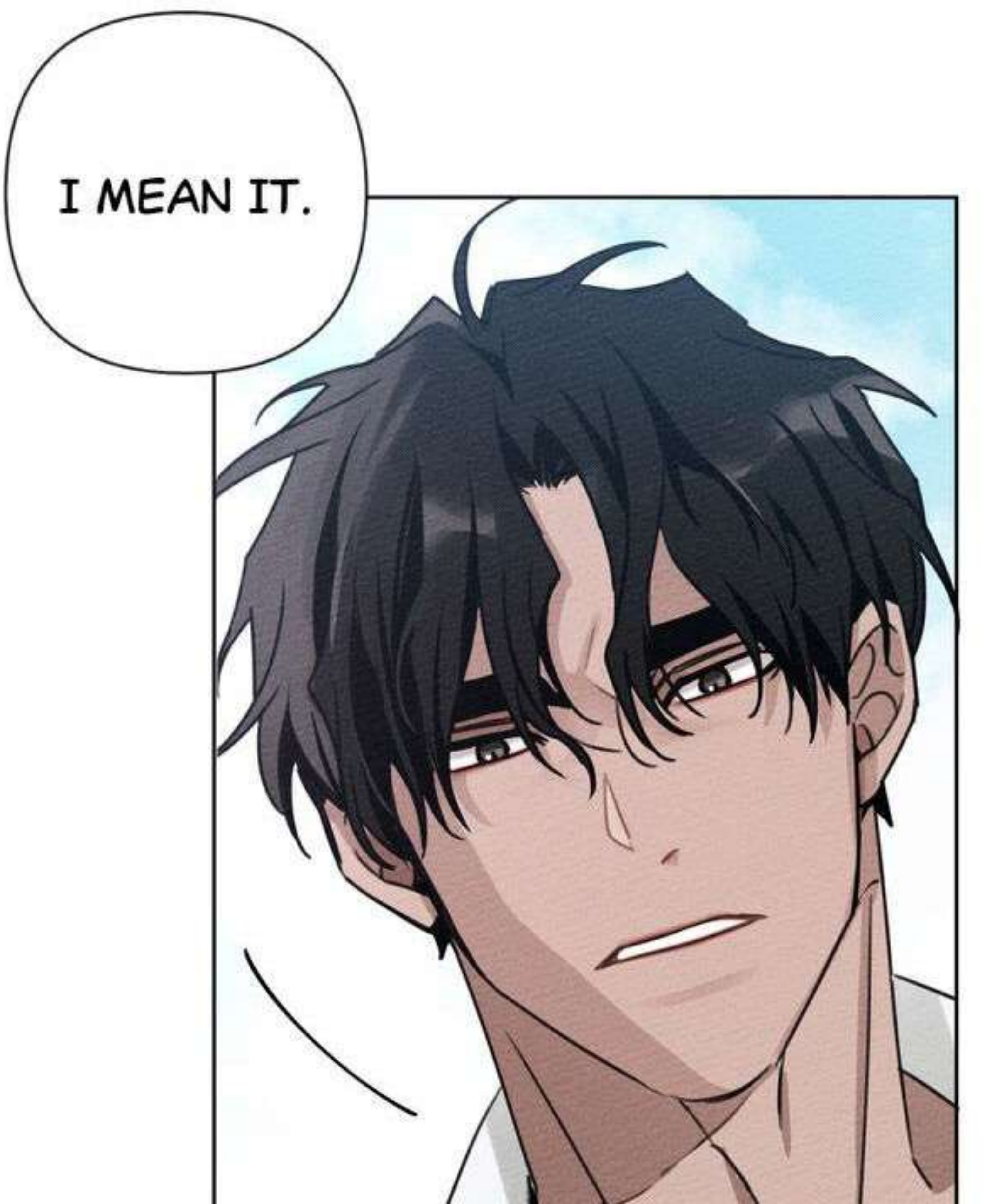
I- I'VE...
I MEAN... Y-YES, I DO.
I ALMOST ADMITTED I'VE NEVER WORN SUCH A FINE DRESS.


I'LL CALL THE DRESSMAKER HERE, AND YOU CAN HAVE ANY DRESS YOU WANT.
I'LL BUY YOU AS MANY AS YOU WANT.

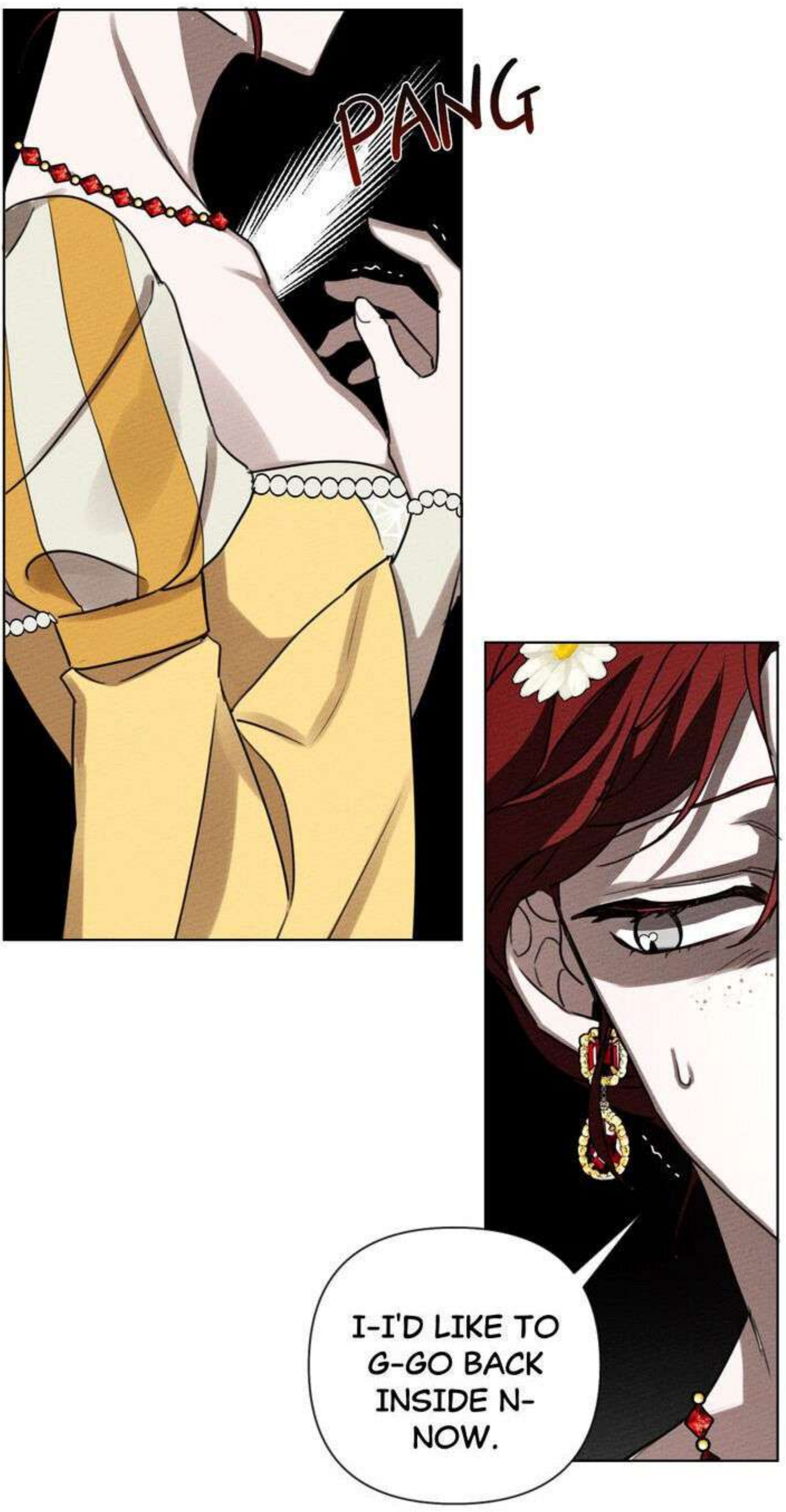

CLENCH

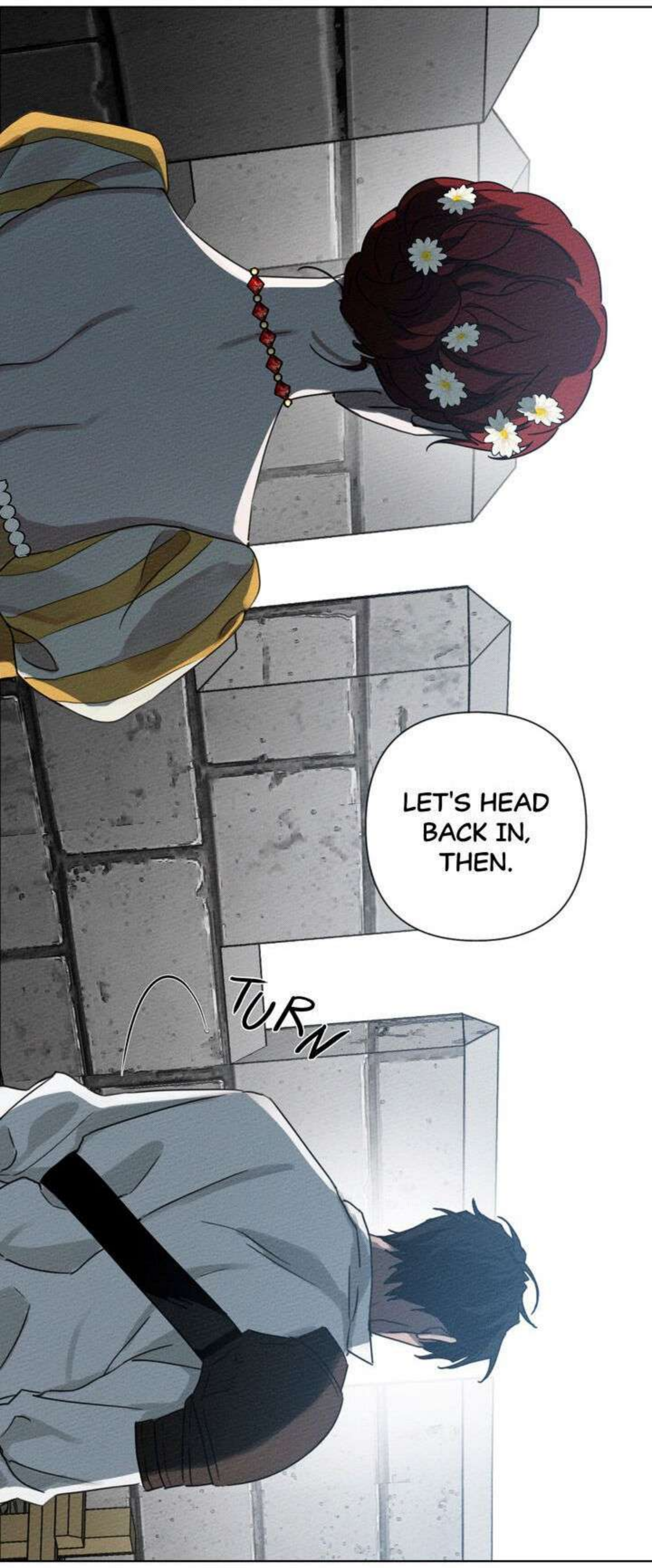

HOW CAN HE CLAIM HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO ACT AROUND WOMEN WHEN HE SAYS THINGS LIKE THAT?
IS TH-THAT A H-HABIT OF YOURS?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I'VE NEVER MET A MAN WHO'S MORE OF A WOMANIZER THAN HIM.
ALWAYS T-TELLING ME YOU'LL G-GET ME ANYTHING I W-WANT...


I MEAN IT.

I TOLD YOU I WOULDN'T GIVE YOU ANY LESS THAN WHAT YOU HAD AT THE CROYSO CASTLE.
HERE, IN ANATOL.


PANG
I-I'D LIKE TO G-GO BACK INSIDE N-NOW.
ARE YOU TIRED?
YES.

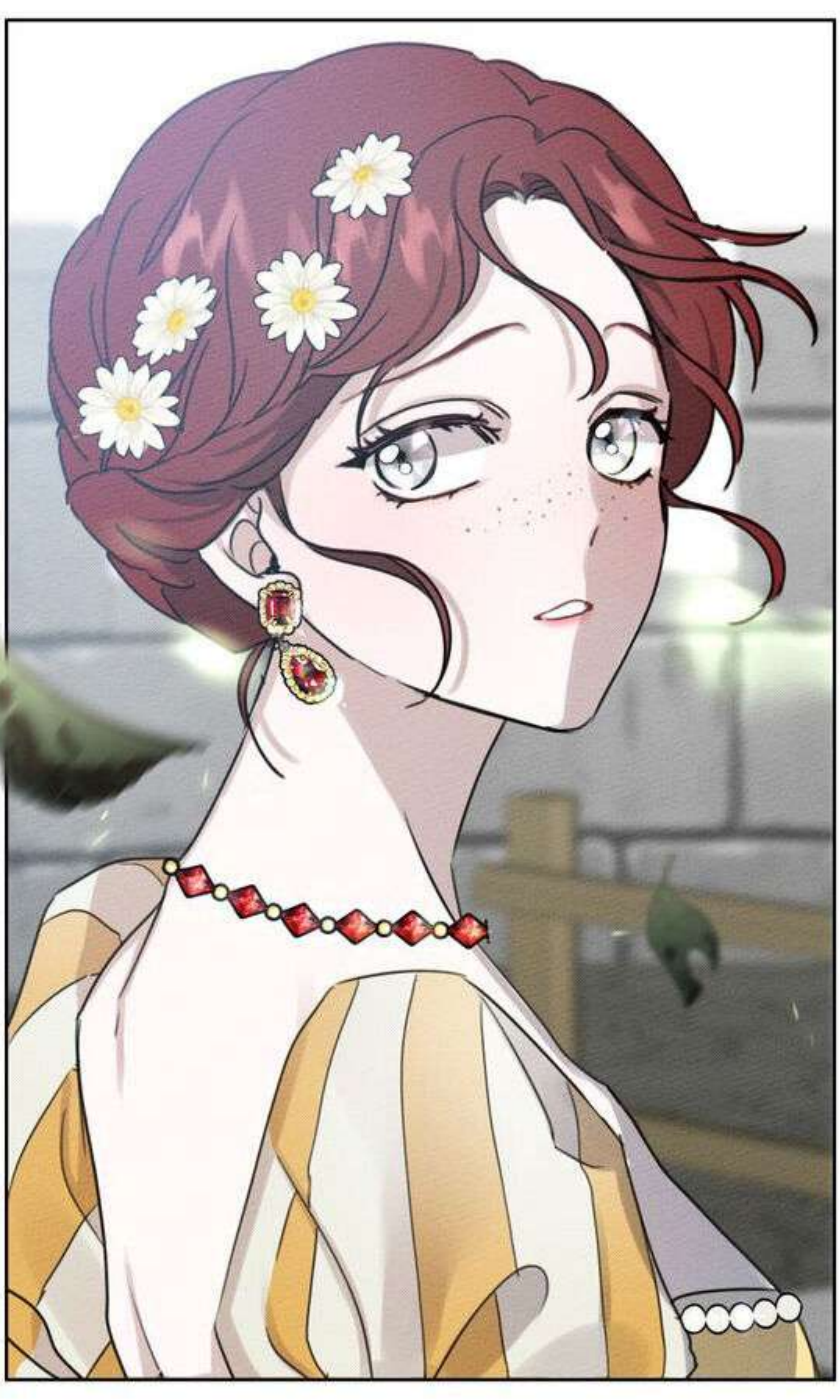

LET'S HEAD BACK IN, THEN.
TURN

HOW WOULD HE REACT

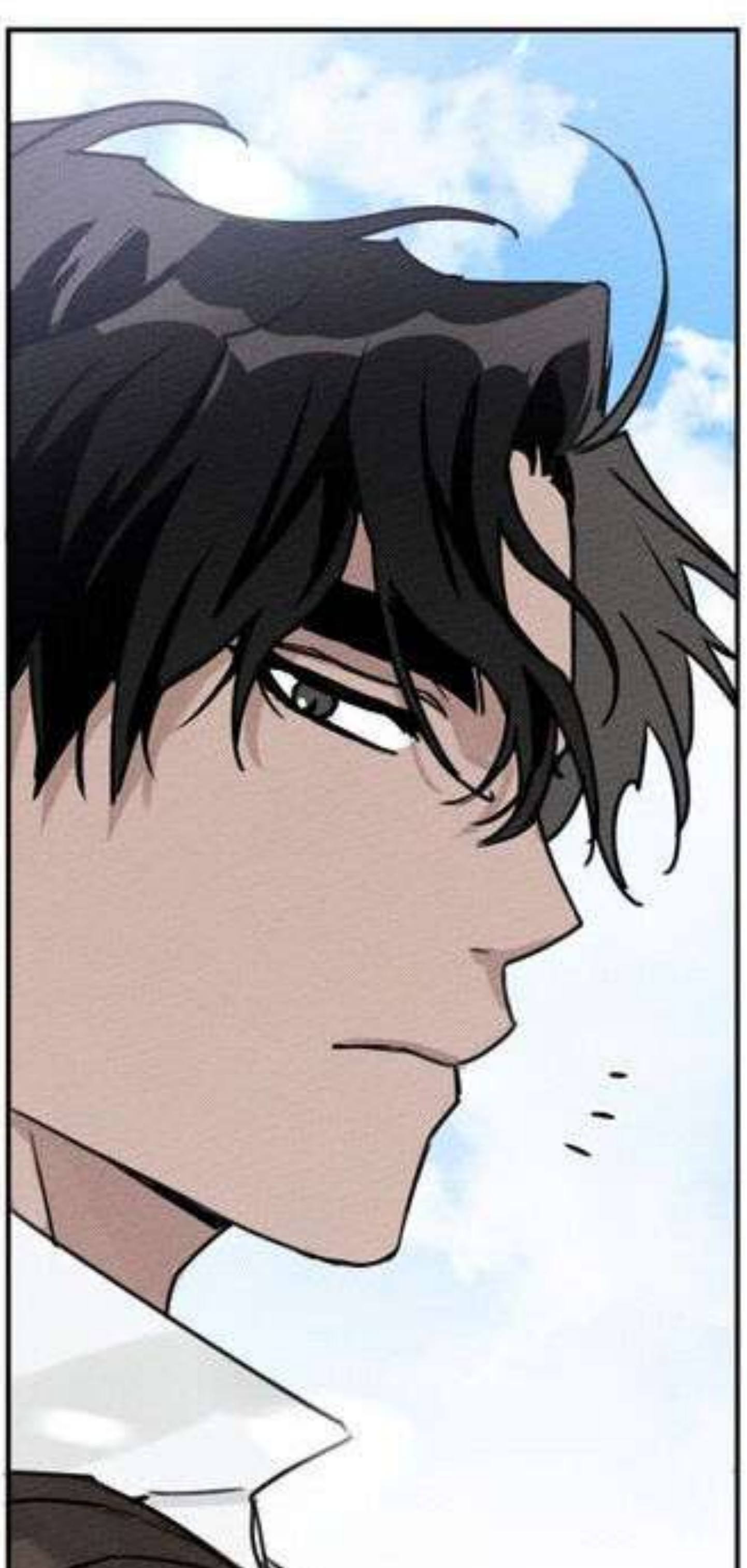
IF HE WERE TO FIND OUT
I'M NOT THE REFINED
NOBLEWOMAN HE THINKS
I AM?

HE MIGHT NOT TREAT ME THE SAME WAY ANYMORE.

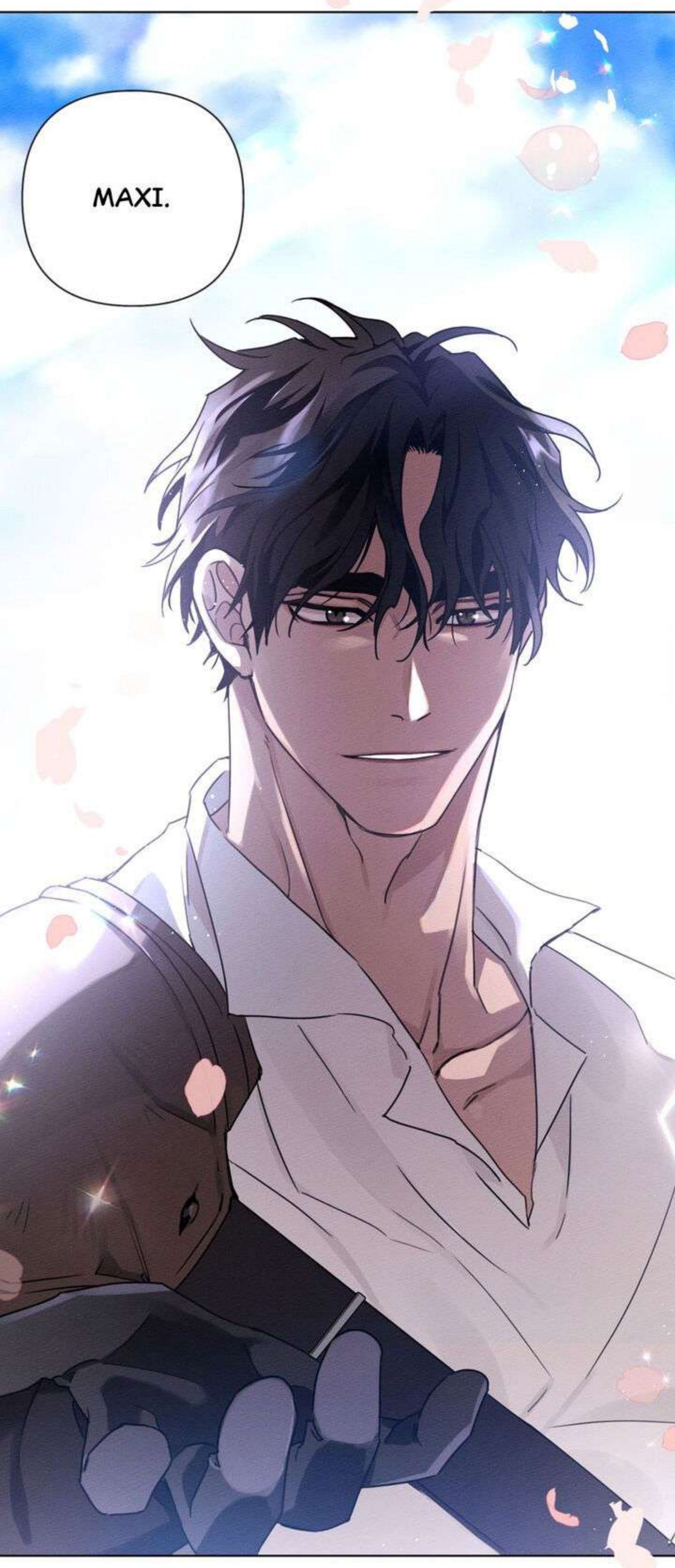
CAN I REALLY



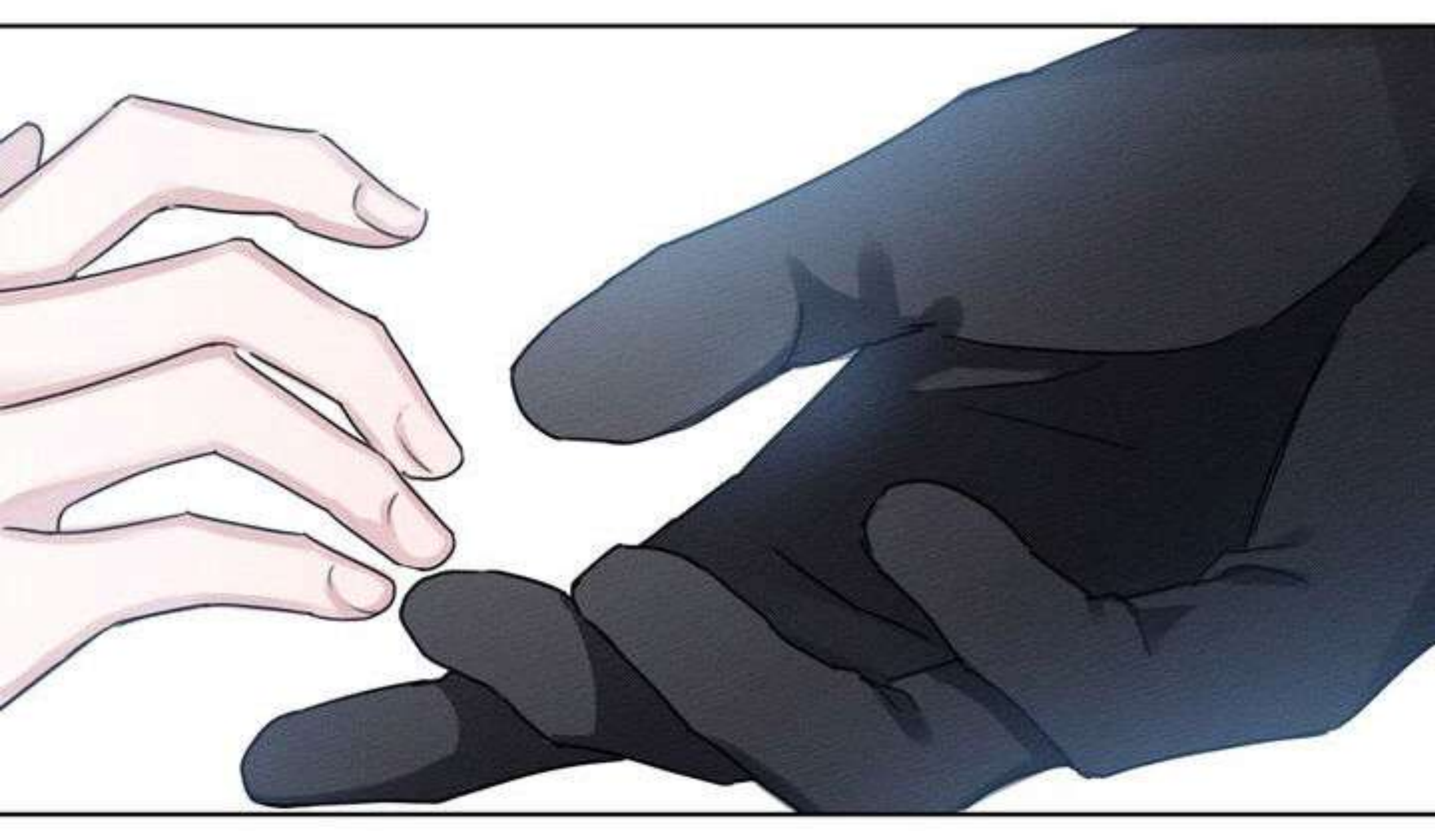
STAY HERE WITH THIS MAN?



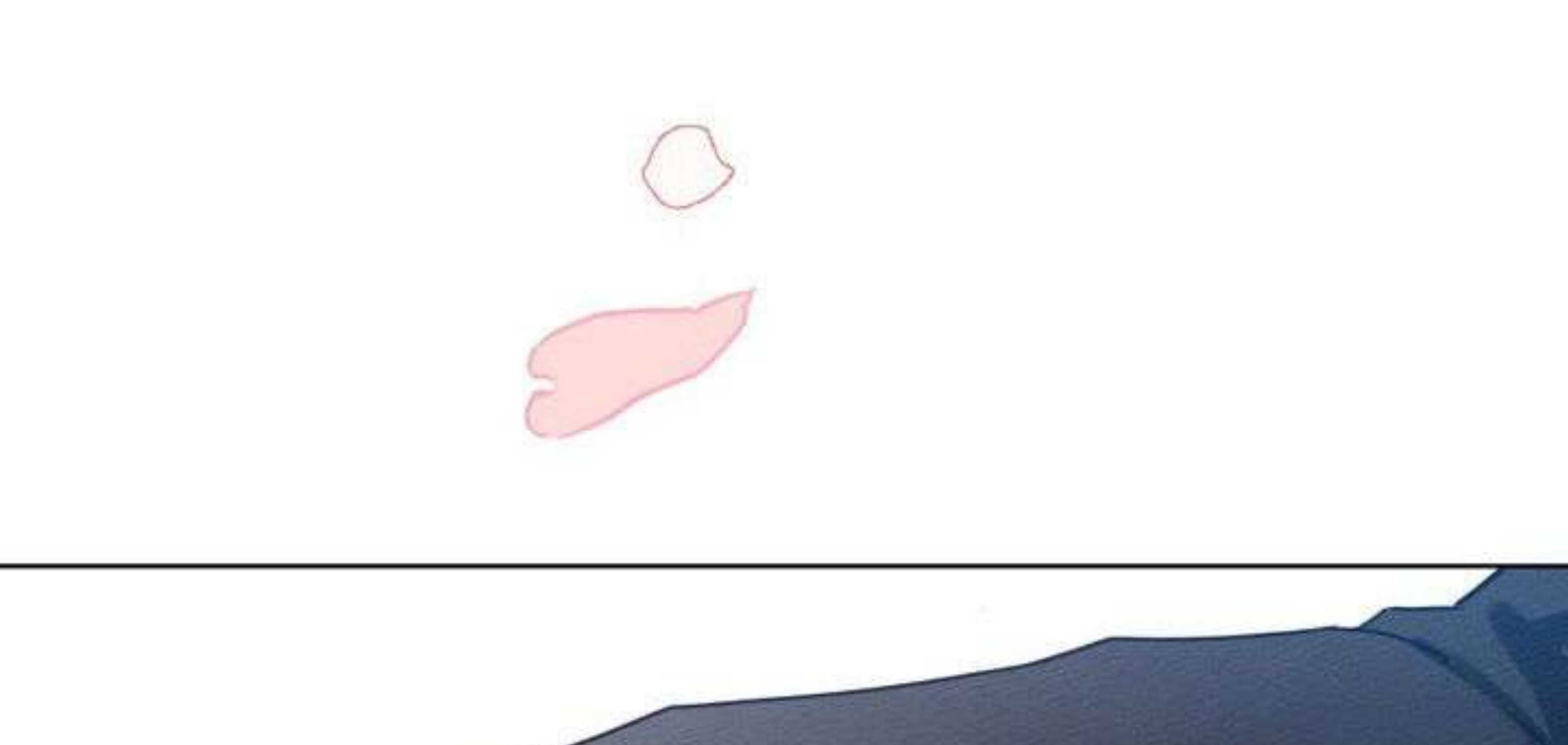
BUT...

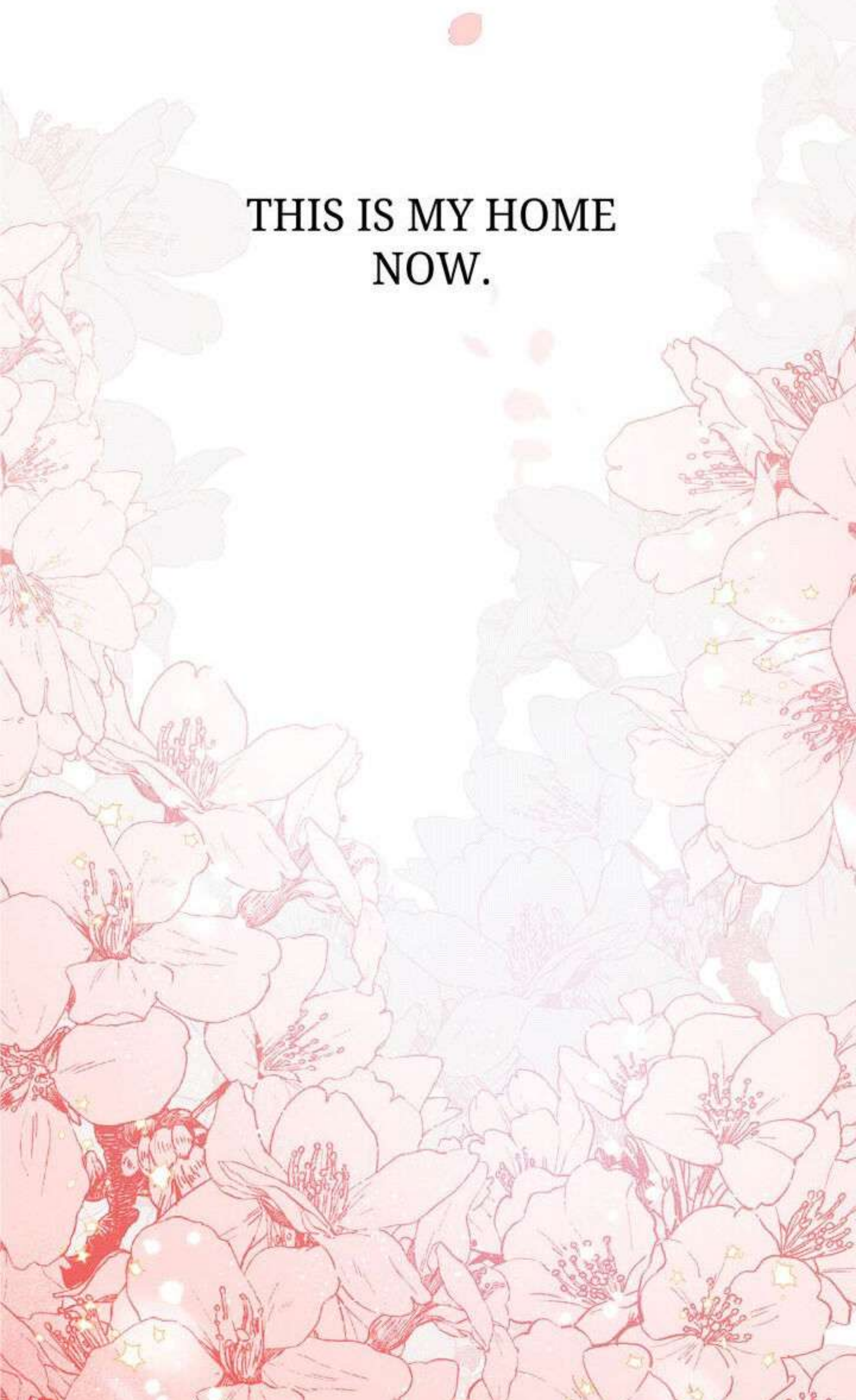


CAN'T I BE A LITTLE GREEDY
FOR ONCE?



AFTER ALL,
AS HE SAID...




THIS IS MY HOME NOW.

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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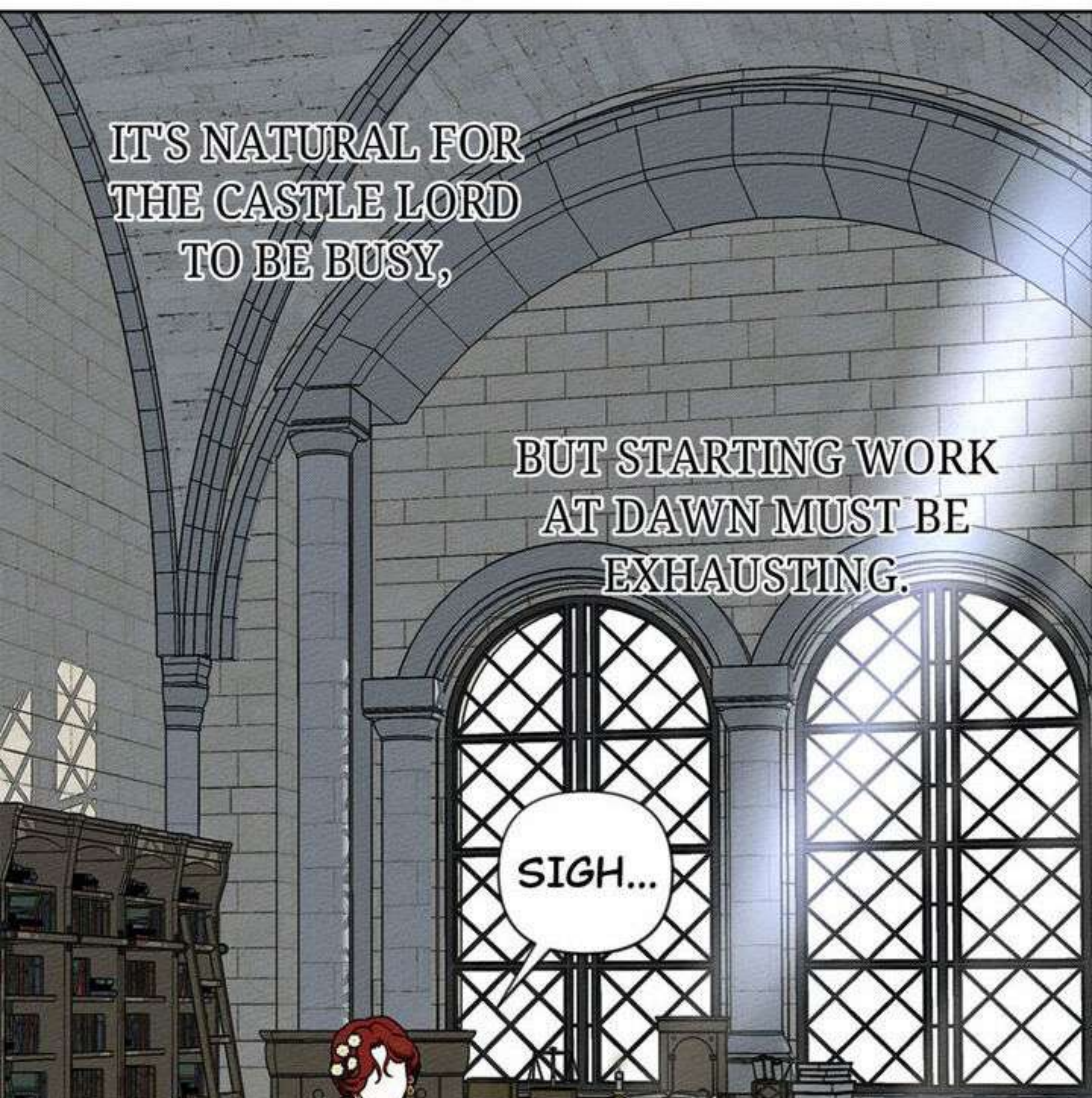
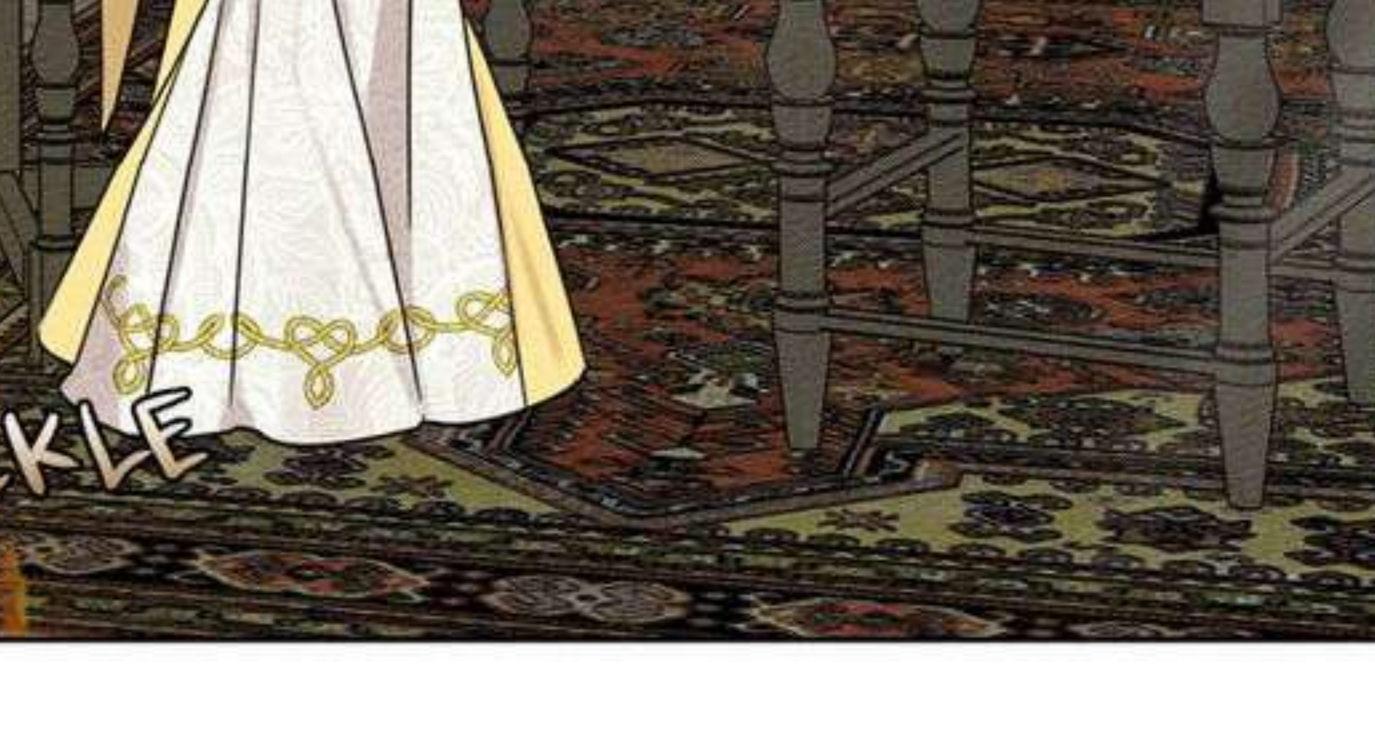
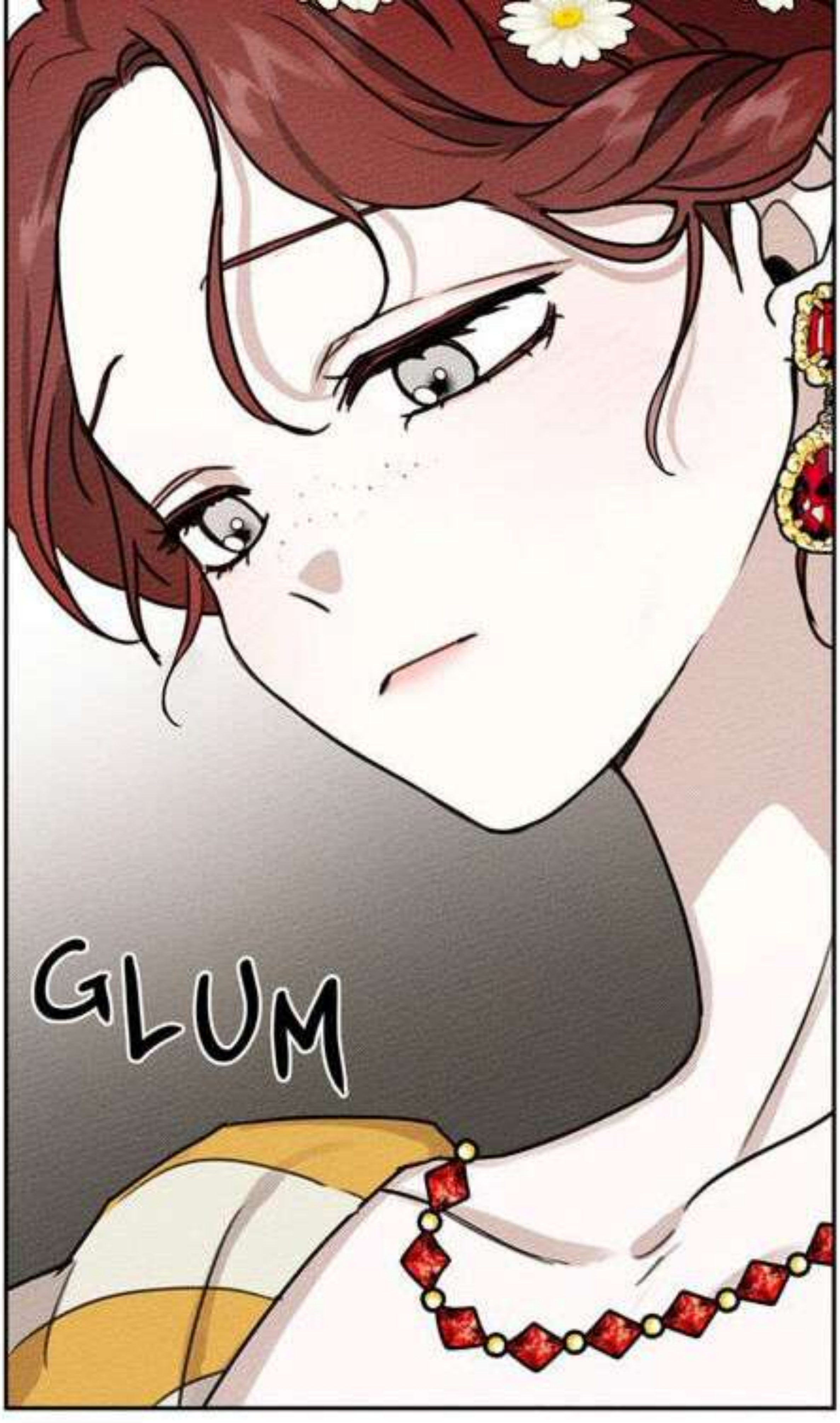
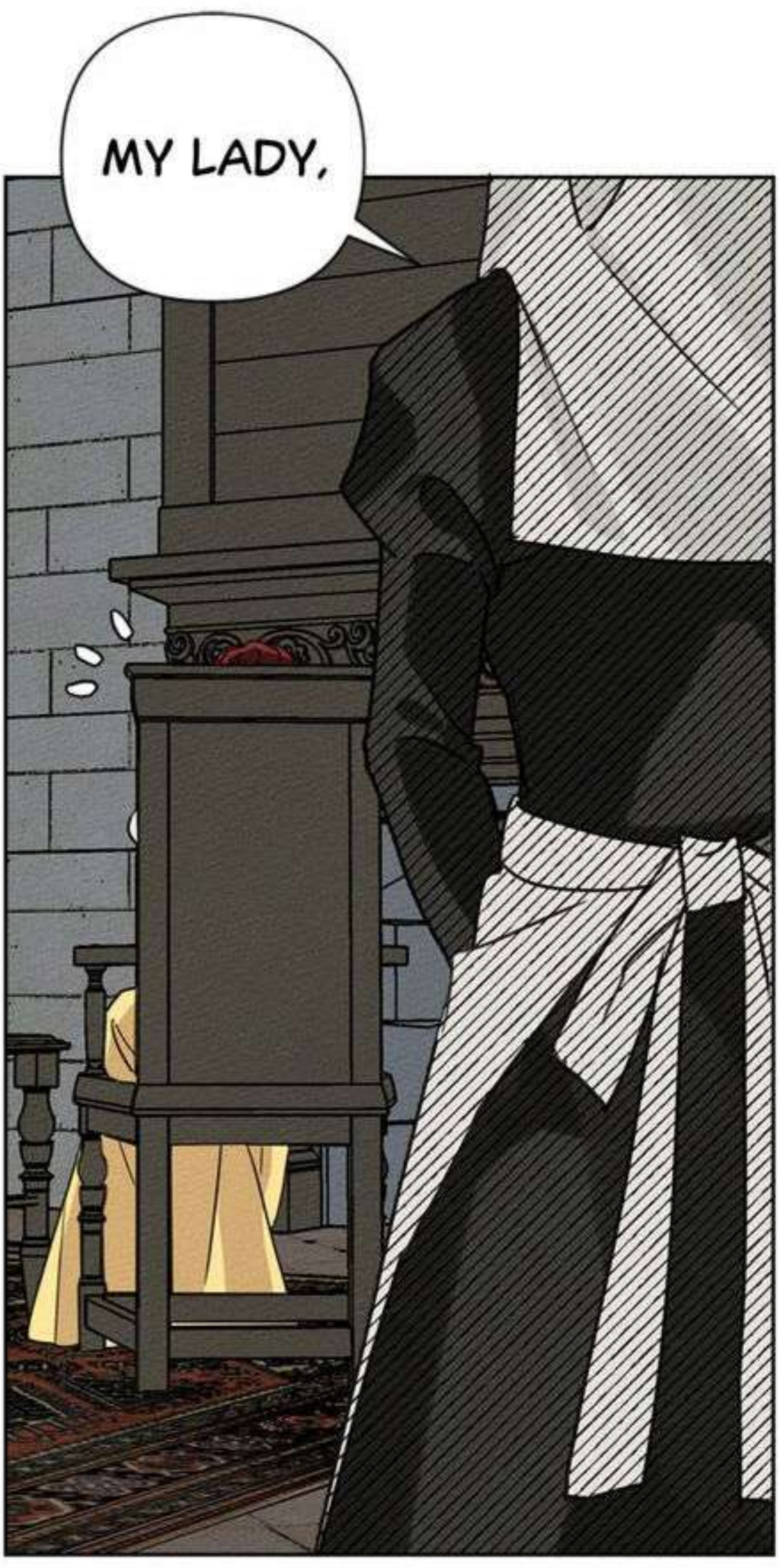
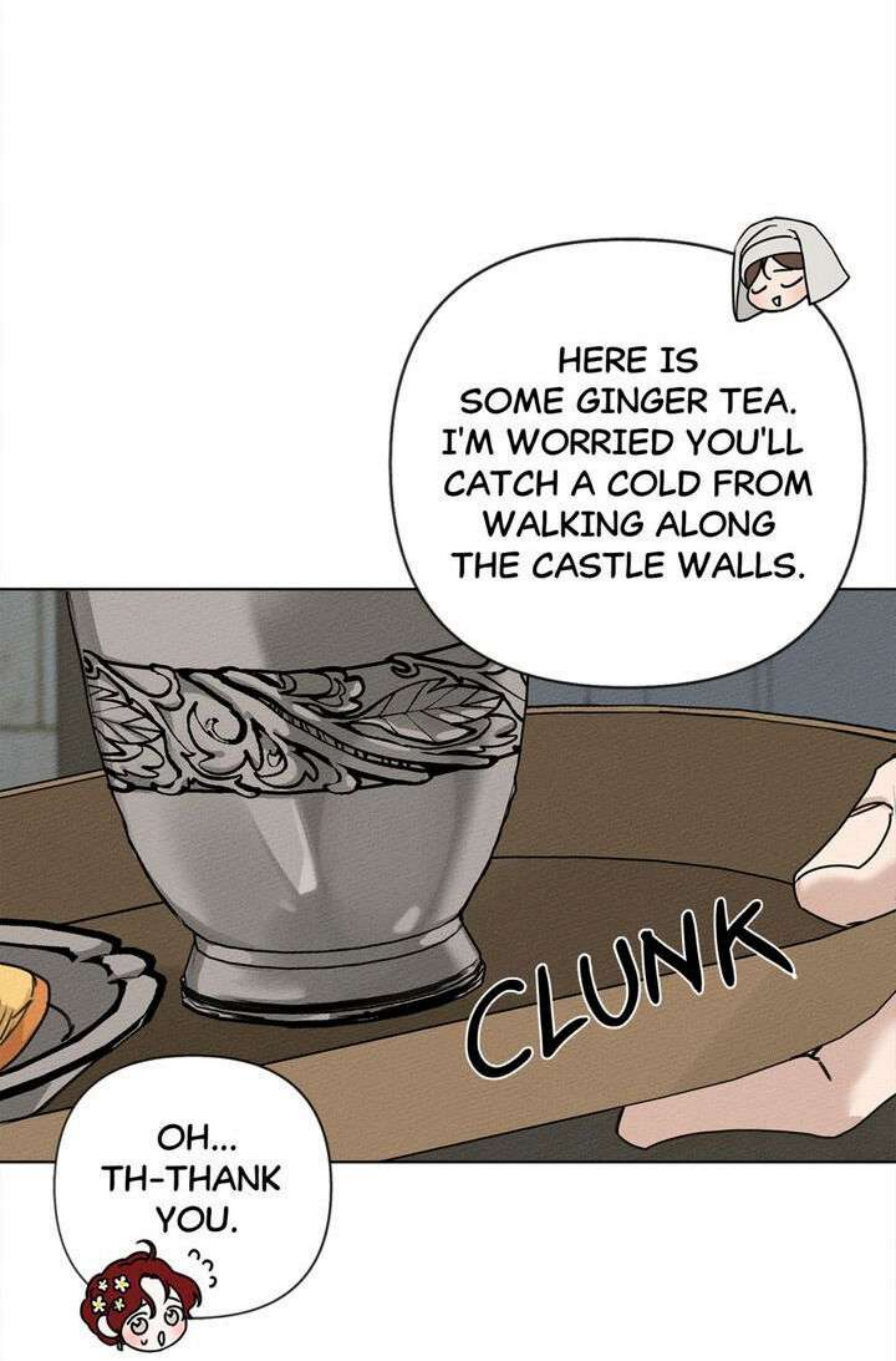
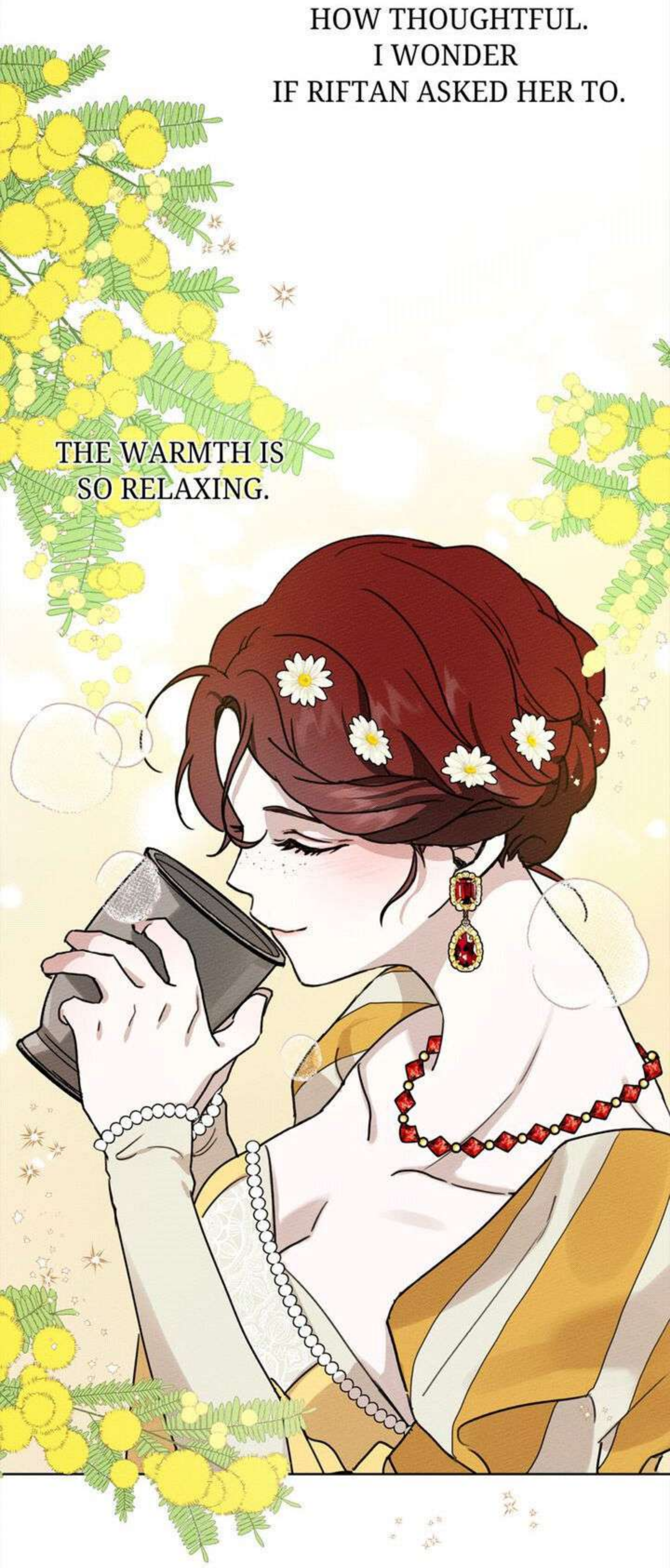

IT'S NATURAL FOR THE CASTLE LORD TO BE BUSY,
BUT STARTING WORK AT DAWN MUST BE EXHAUSTING.
SIGH...
CRACKLE
CRACKLE

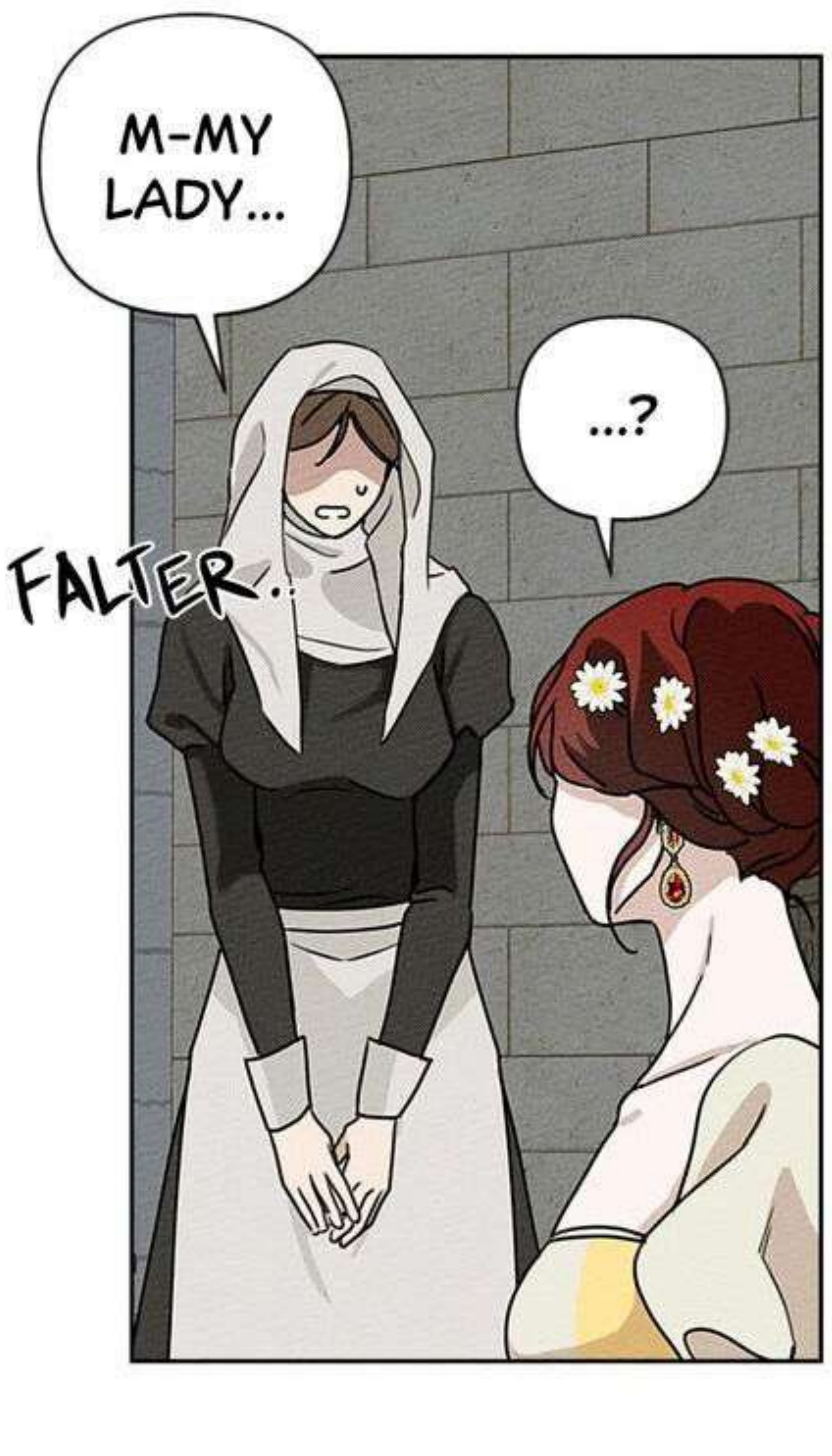

I HAVE TO RETURN TO THE TRAINING GROUNDS, BUT I'LL SEE YOU AT THE FEAST TONIGHT.

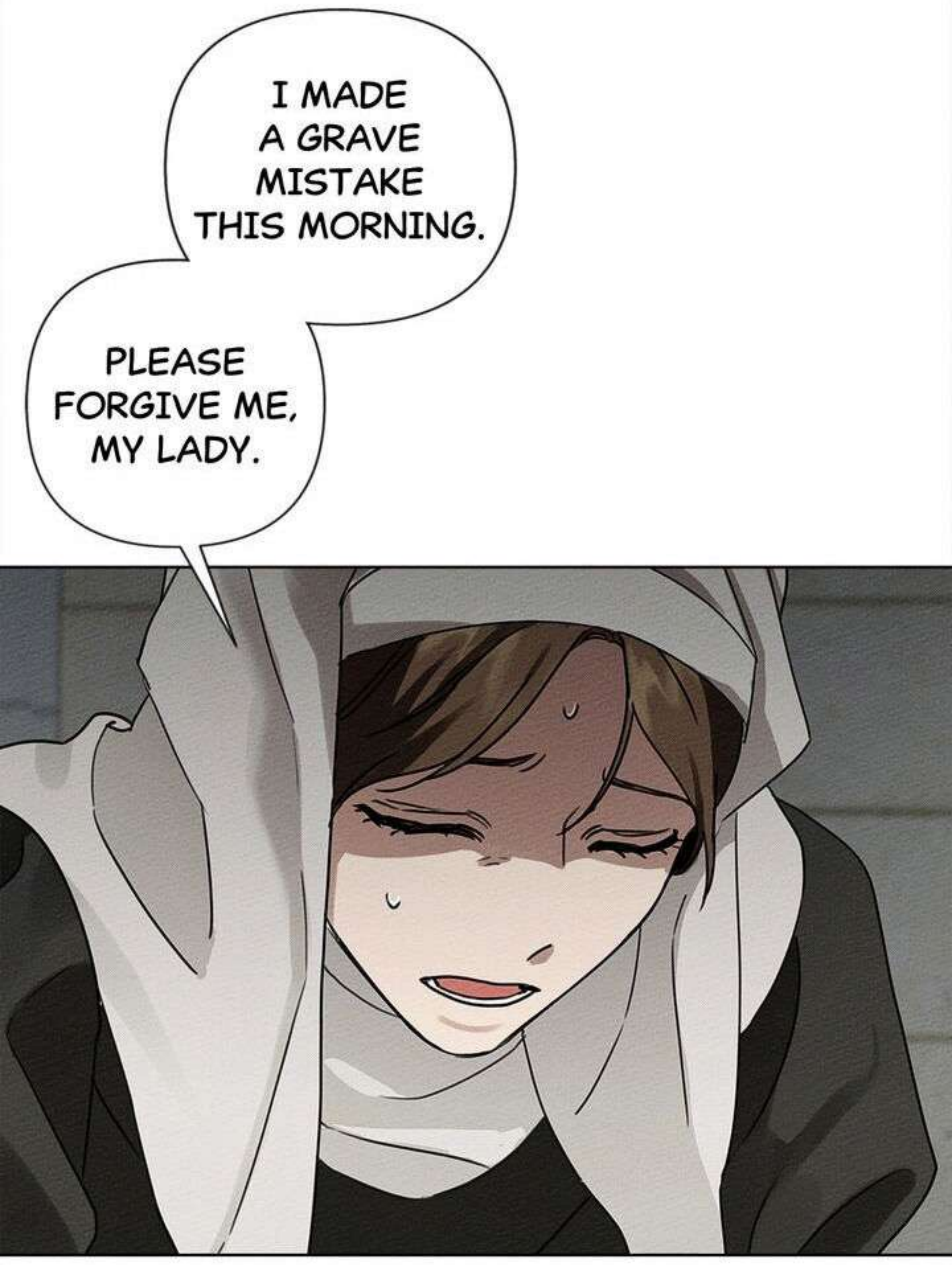

GLUM

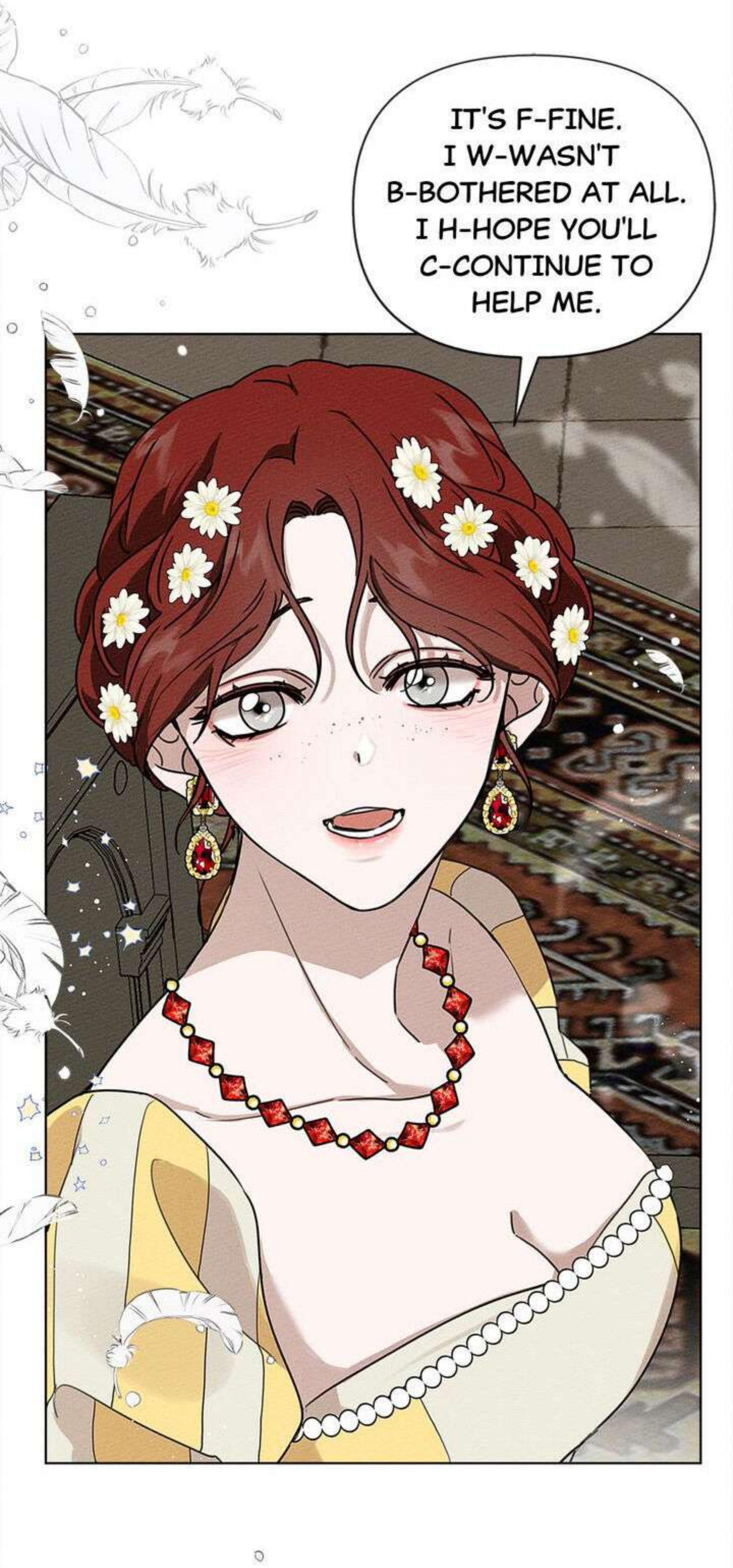

MY LADY,


HERE IS SOME GINGER TEA. I'M WORRIED YOU'LL CATCH A COLD FROM WALKING ALONG THE CASTLE WALLS.
CLUNK
OH... TH-THANK YOU.

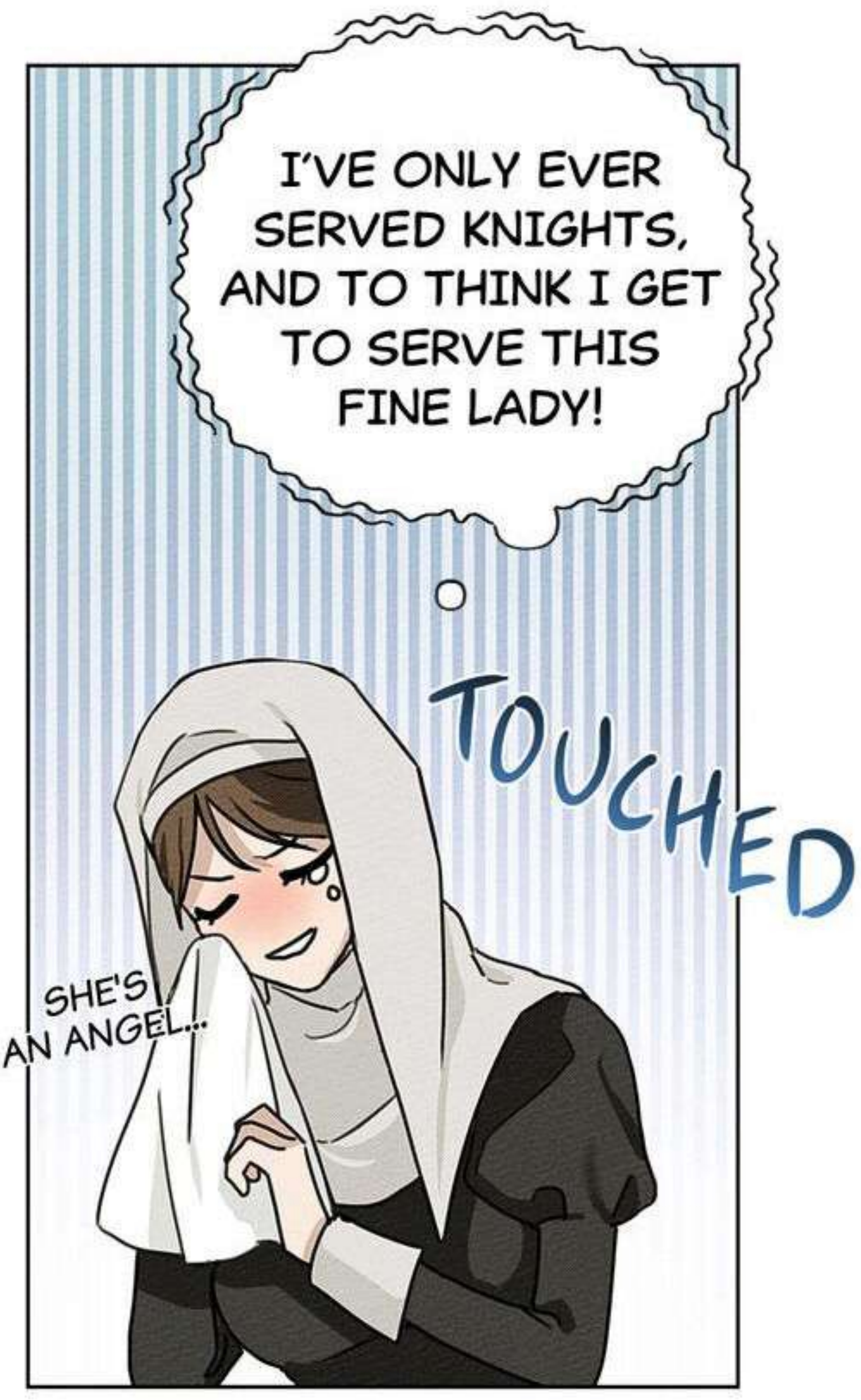

HOW THOUGHTFUL. I WONDER IF RIFTAN ASKED HER TO.
THE WARMTH IS SO RELAXING.

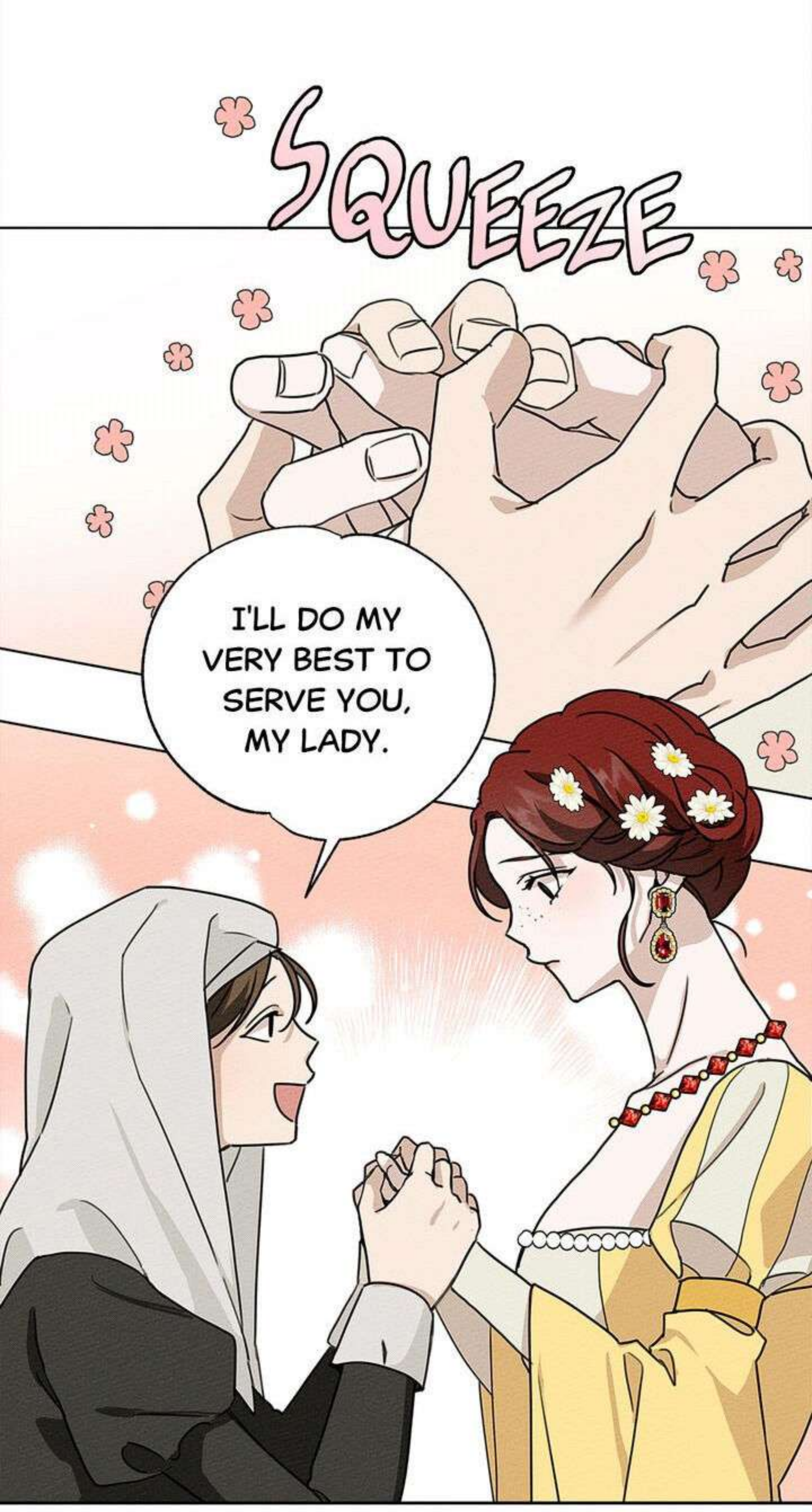

M-MY LADY...
FALTER..
...?


I MADE A GRAVE MISTAKE THIS MORNING.
PLEASE FORGIVE ME, MY LADY.


IT'S F-FINE. I W-WASN'T B-BOTHERED AT ALL. I H-HOPE YOU'LL C-CONTINUE TO HELP ME.

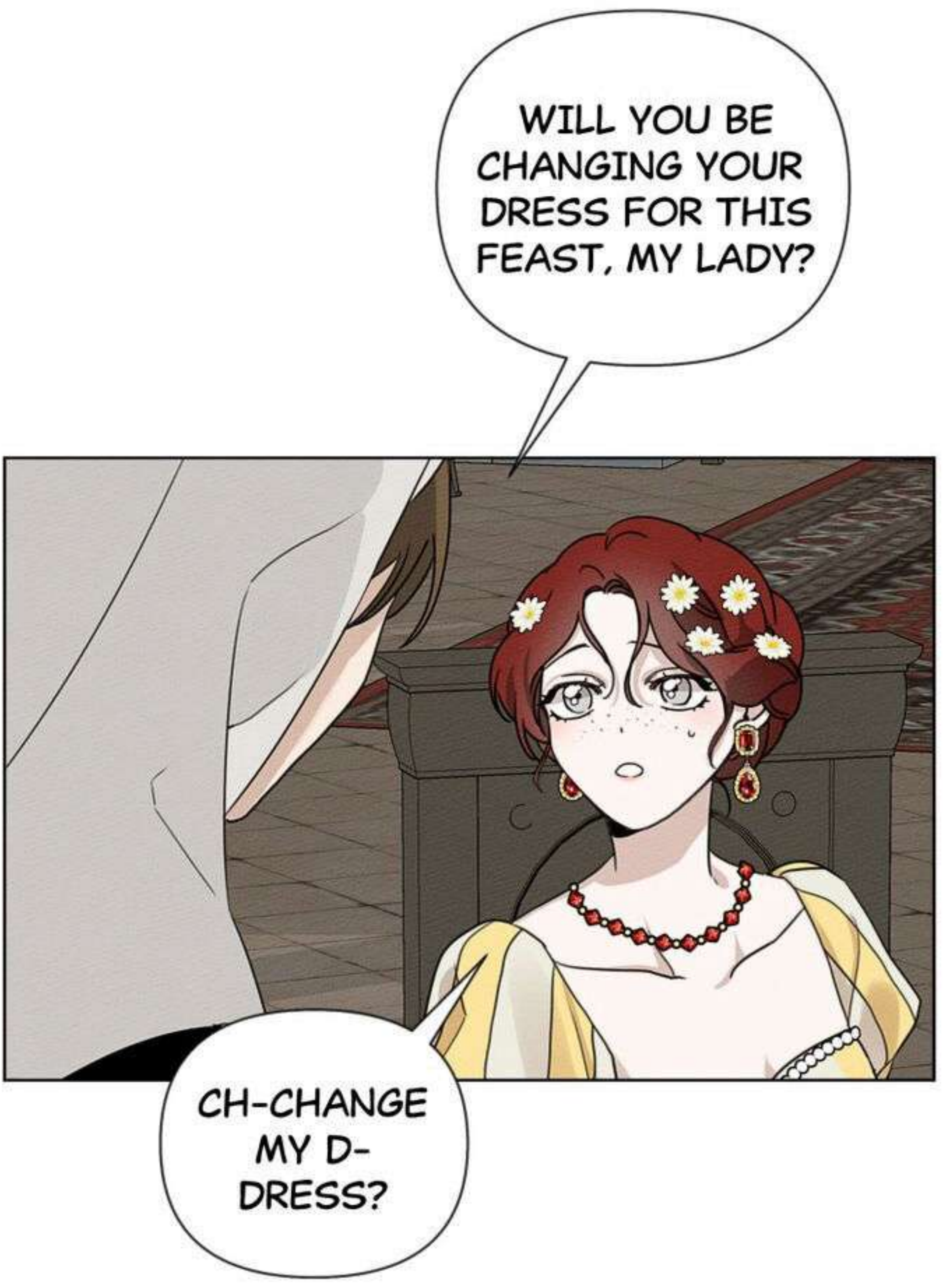
NO ONE IN THE CROYSO CASTLE CARED ABOUT ME.

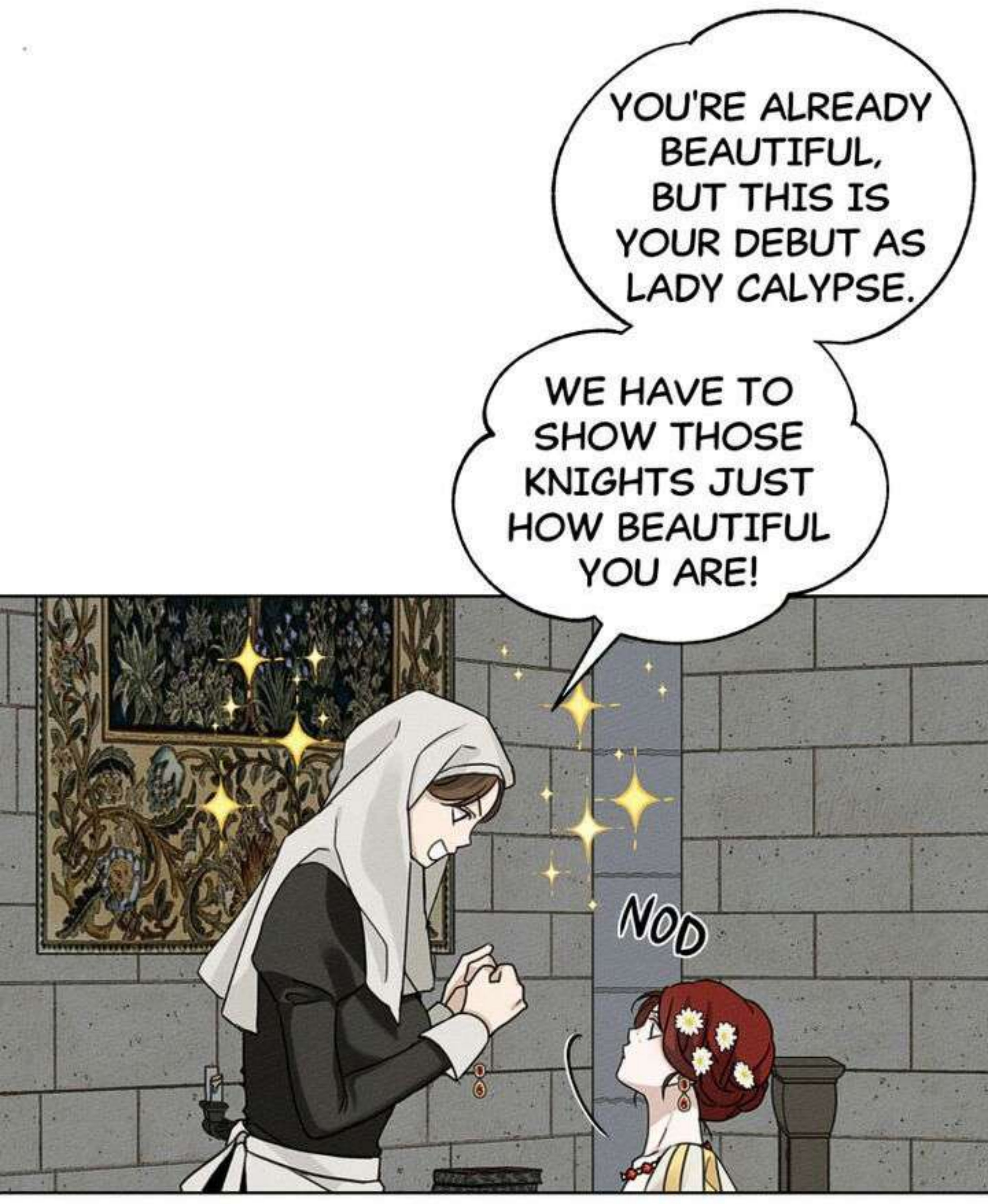

I'VE ONLY EVER SERVED KNIGHTS, AND TO THINK I GET TO SERVE THIS FINE LADY!
TOUCHED
SHE'S AN ANGEL...

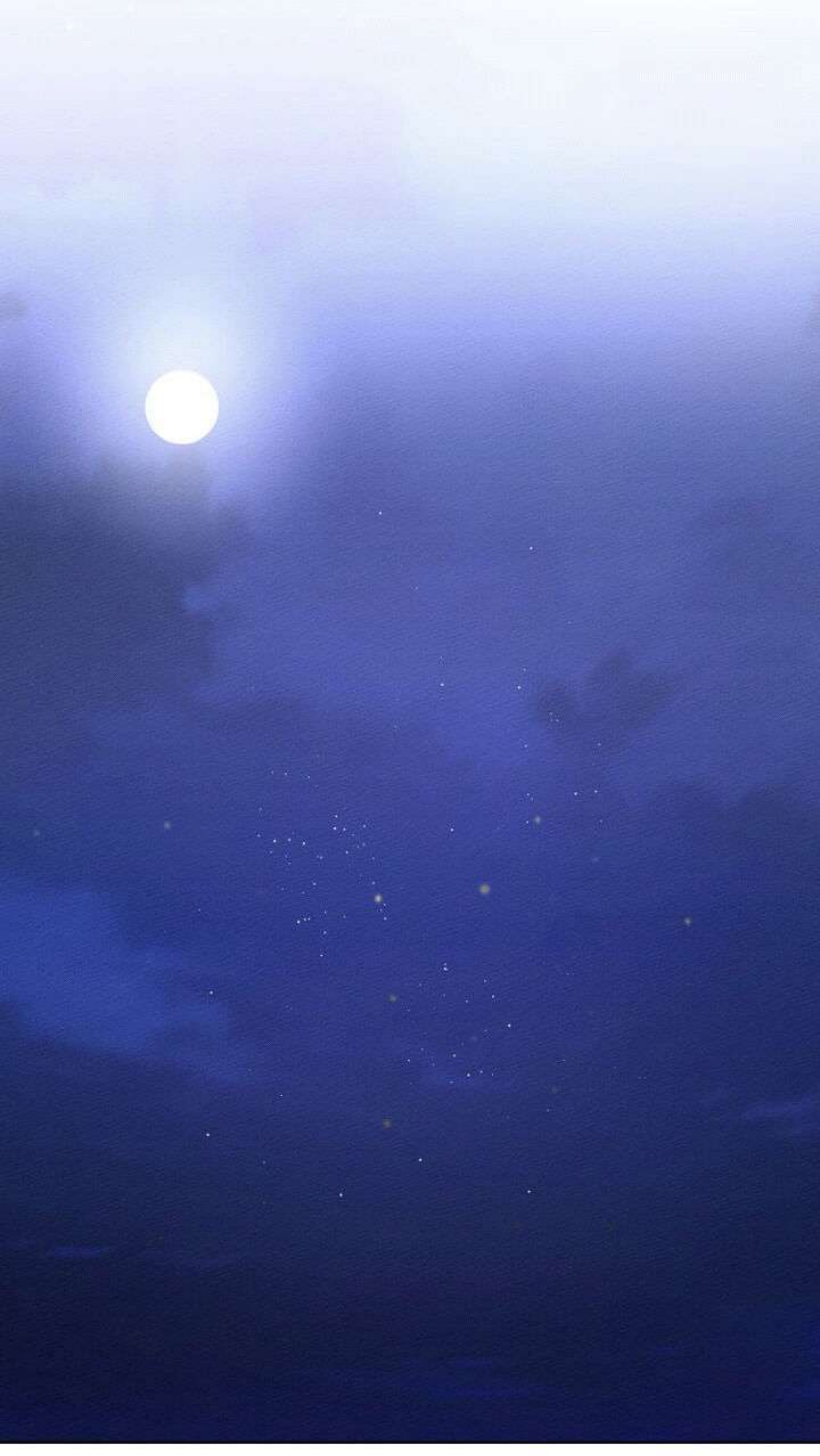

SQUEEZE
I'LL DO MY VERY BEST TO SERVE YOU, MY LADY.

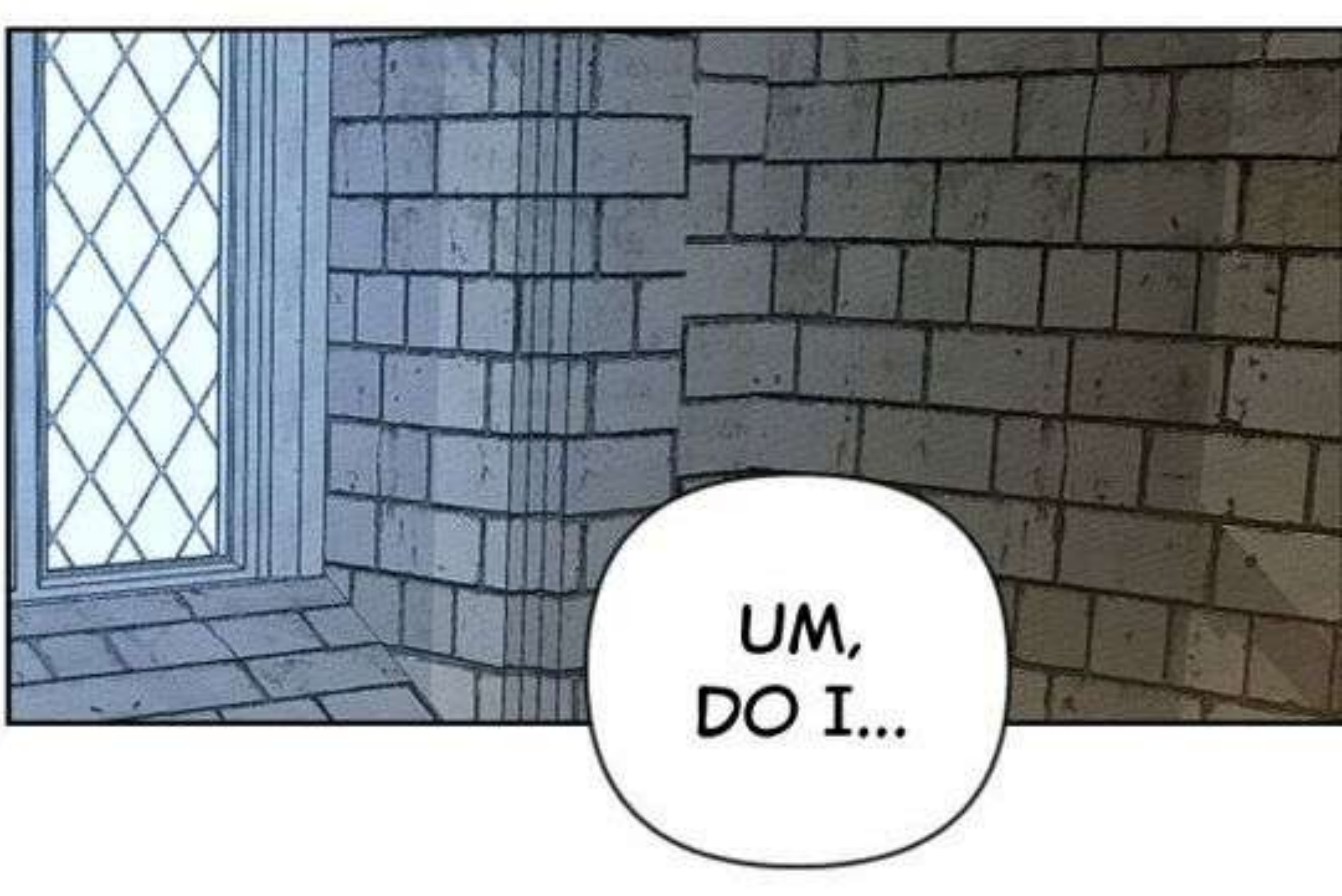
EVERYONE HERE IS LIKE RIFTAN.

UNPREDICTABLE AND SURPRISINGLY KIND.

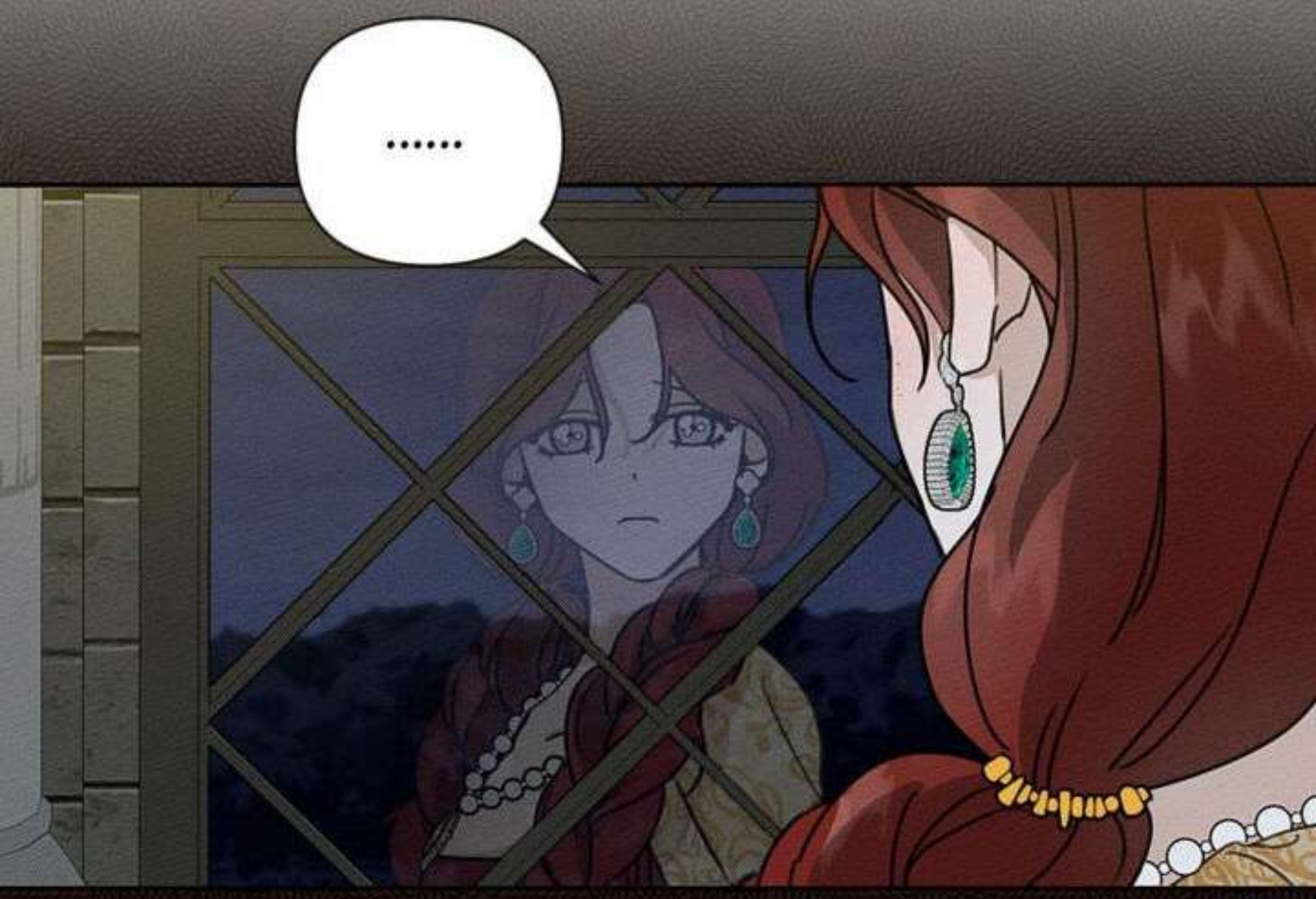

WILL YOU BE CHANGING YOUR DRESS FOR THIS FEAST, MY LADY?
CH-CHANGE MY D-DRESS?


YOU'RE ALREADY BEAUTIFUL, BUT THIS IS YOUR DEBUT AS LADY CALYPSE.
WE HAVE TO SHOW THOSE KNIGHTS JUST HOW BEAUTIFUL YOU ARE!
NOD

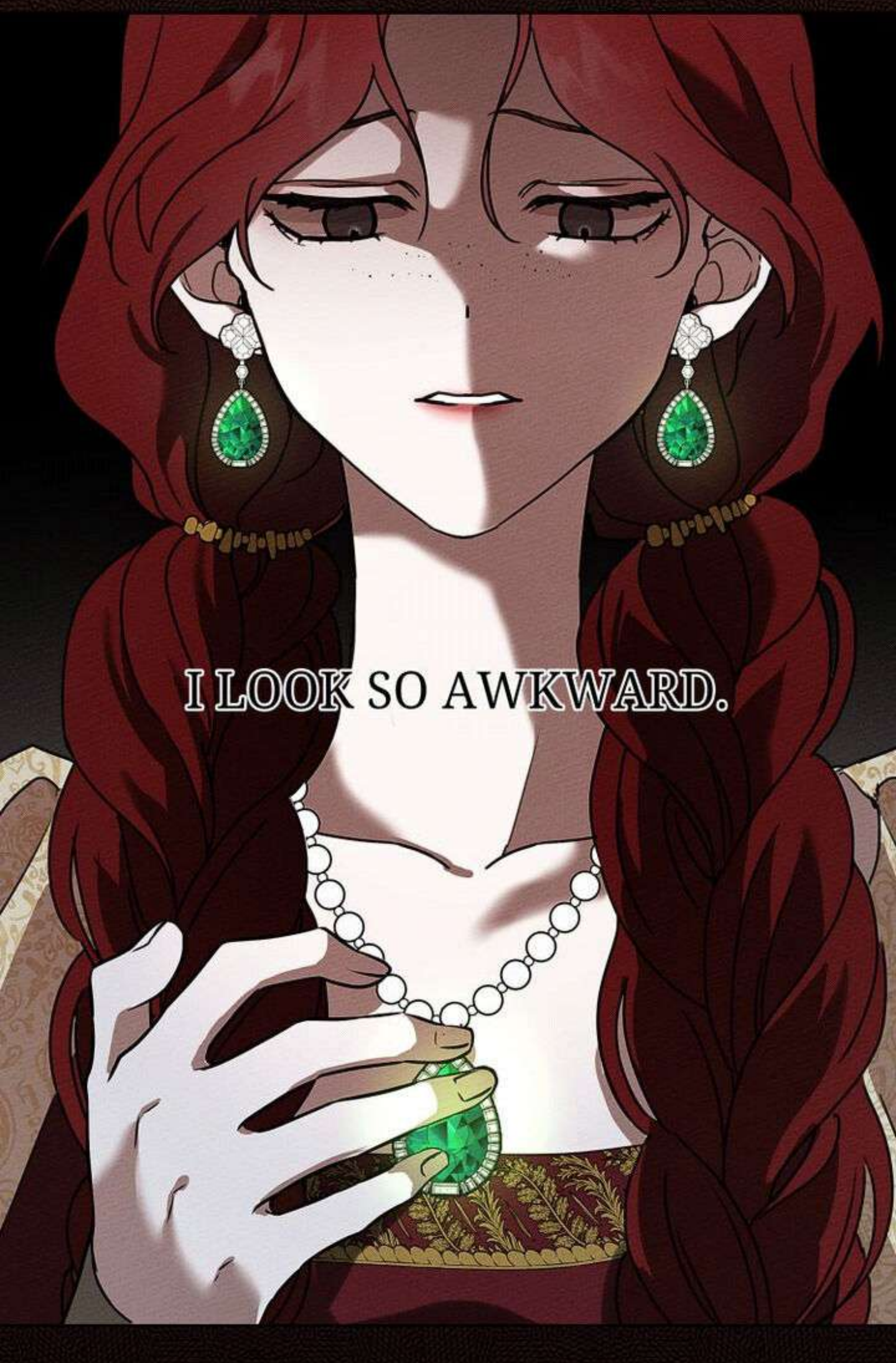



UM, DO I...

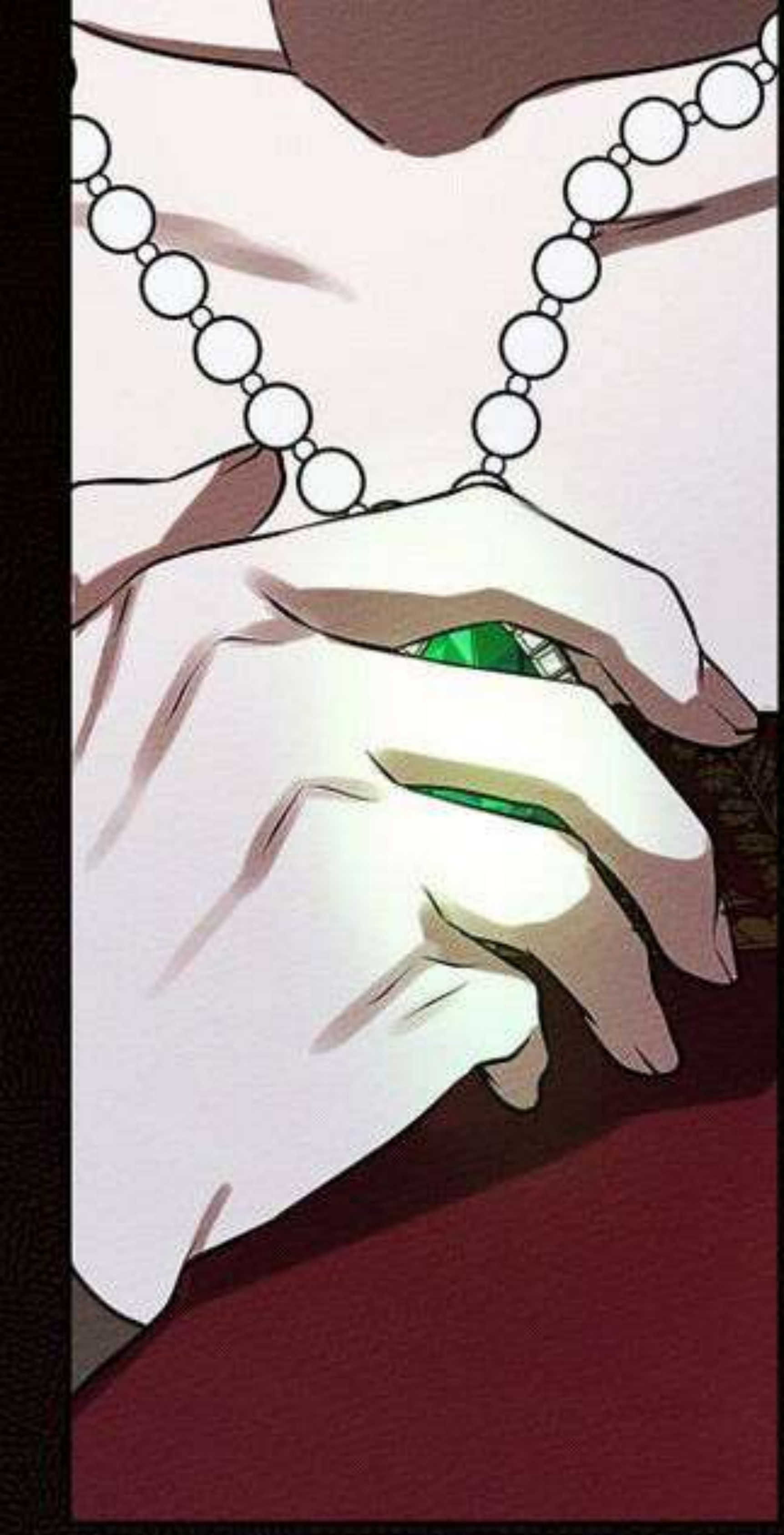
L-LOOK
ALL RIGHT?
YOU LOOK MARVELOUS, MY LADY.

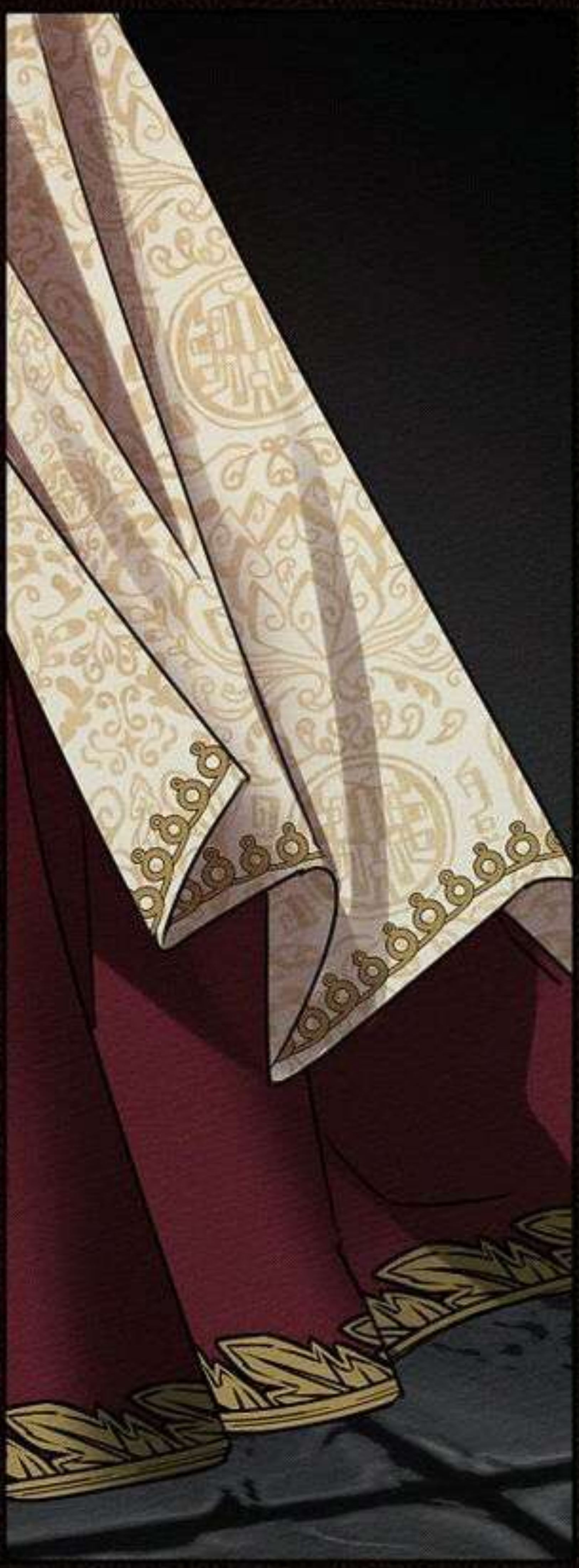


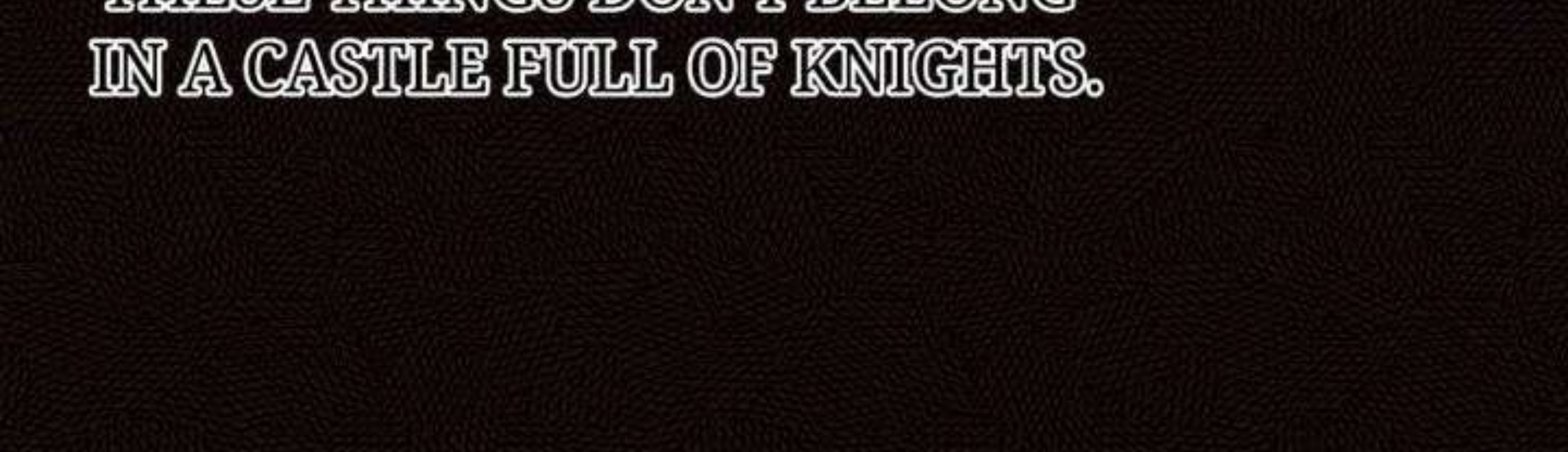
LIKE A LITTLE GIRL PLAYING
WITH HER MOTHER'S JEWELS,

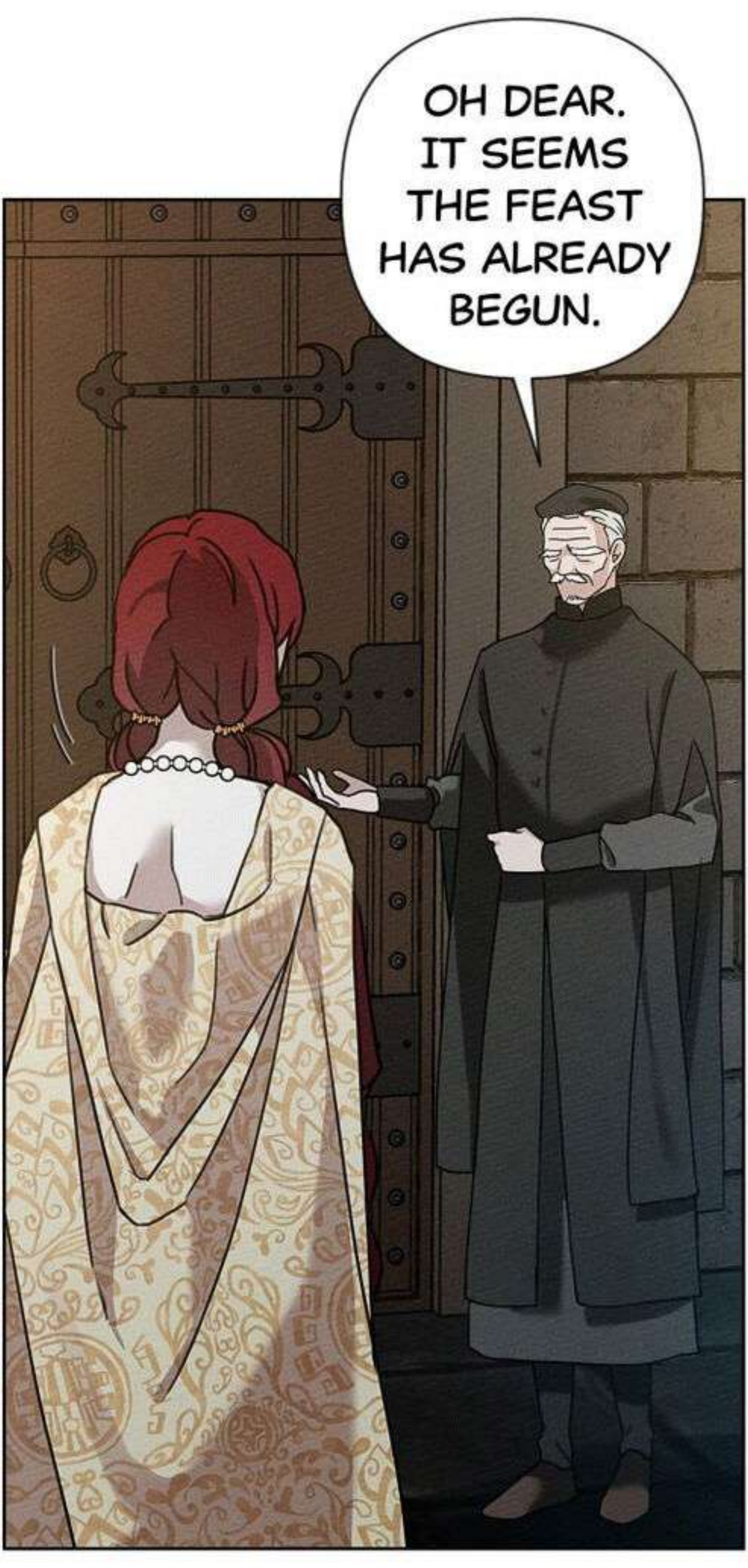

I LOOK SO AWKWARD.

BUT WHY ARE JEWELS
LIKE THESE HERE?


AND ELEGANT GOWNS, TOO...


THESE THINGS DON'T BELONG IN A CASTLE FULL OF KNIGHTS.
WHY WOULD THEY BE HERE WITHOUT AN OWNER?

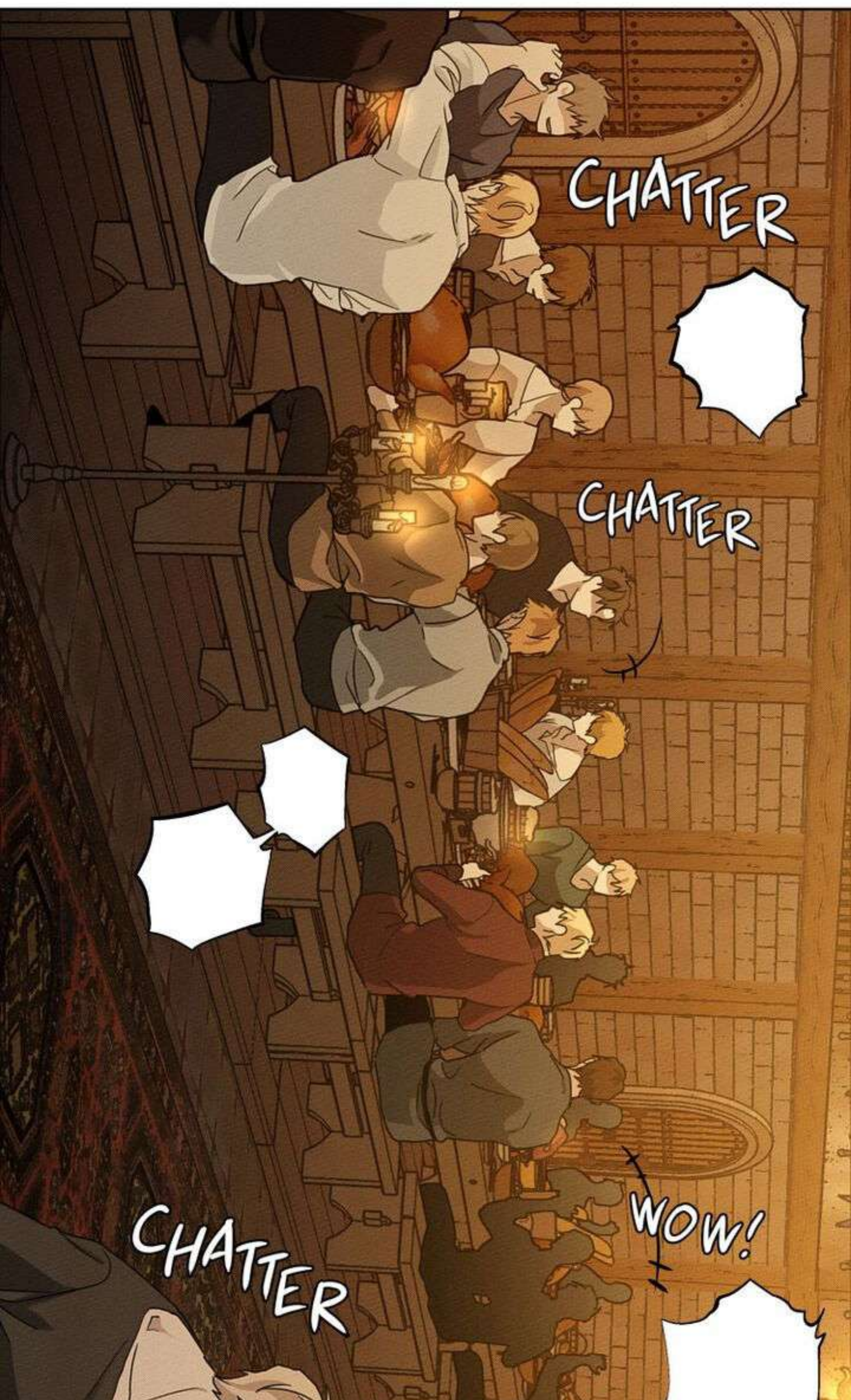

CLENCH
DID THEY BELONG TO AN OLD LOVER...?
WE'RE HERE, MY LADY.

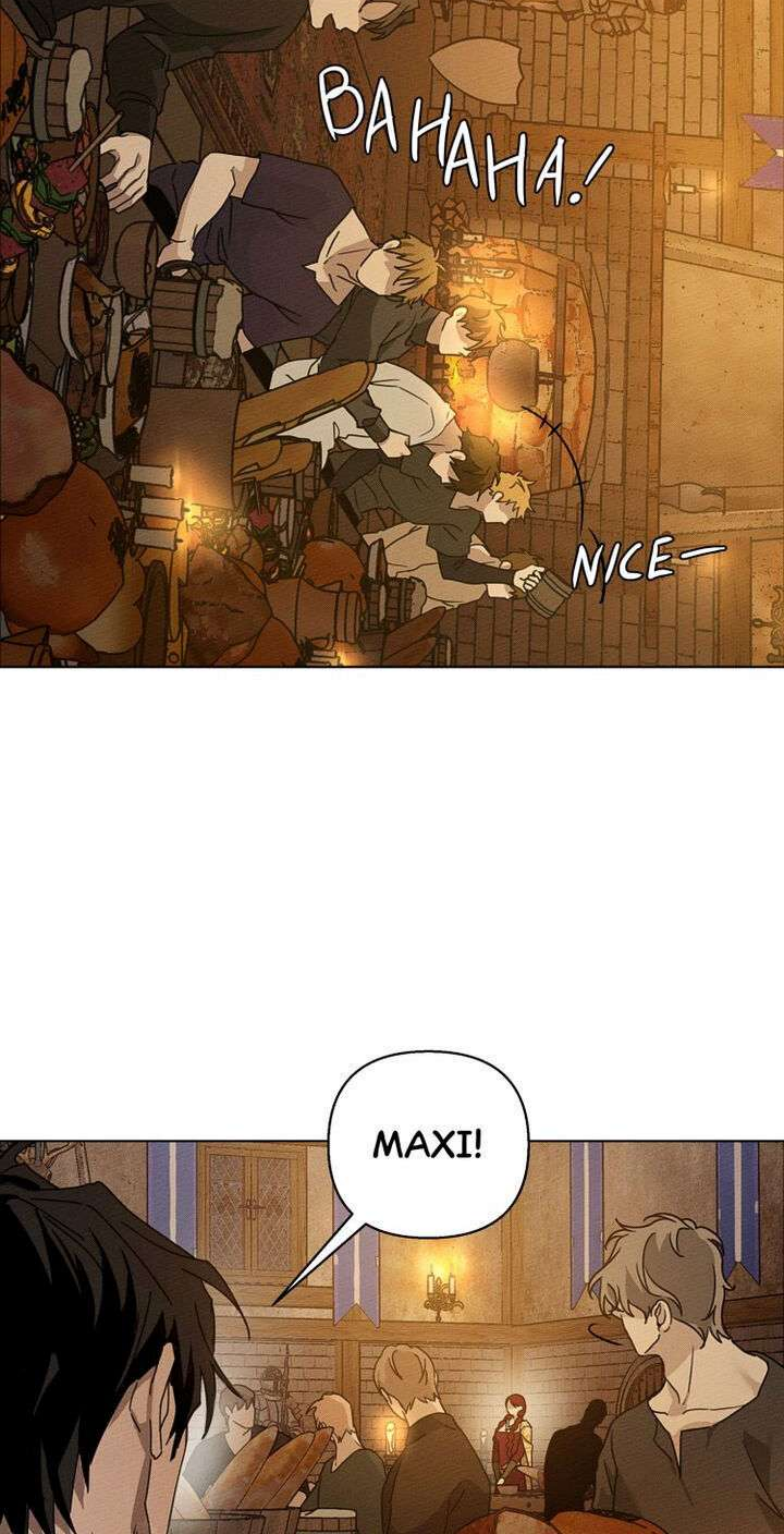

OH DEAR. IT SEEMS THE FEAST HAS ALREADY BEGUN.

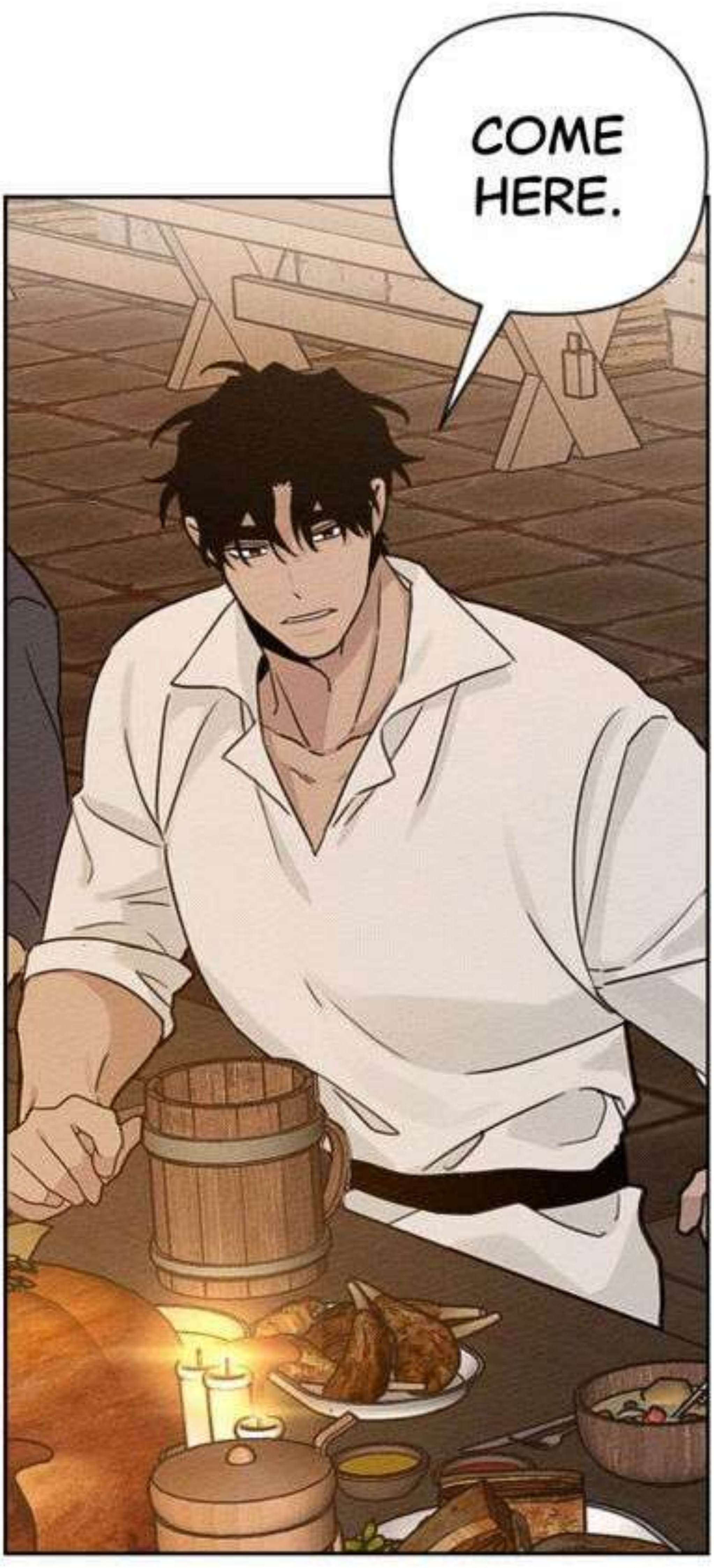
INHALE

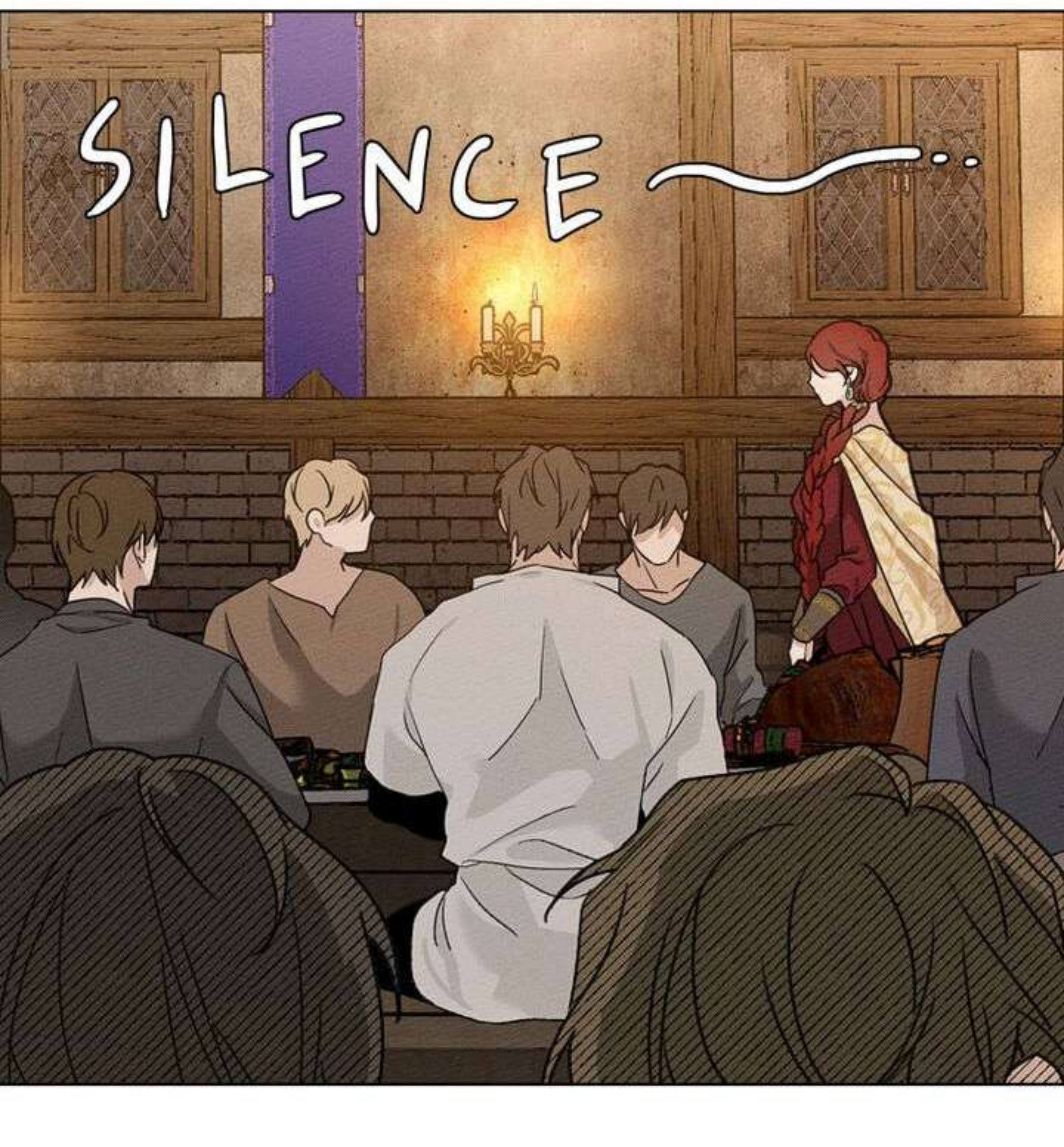
EXHALE

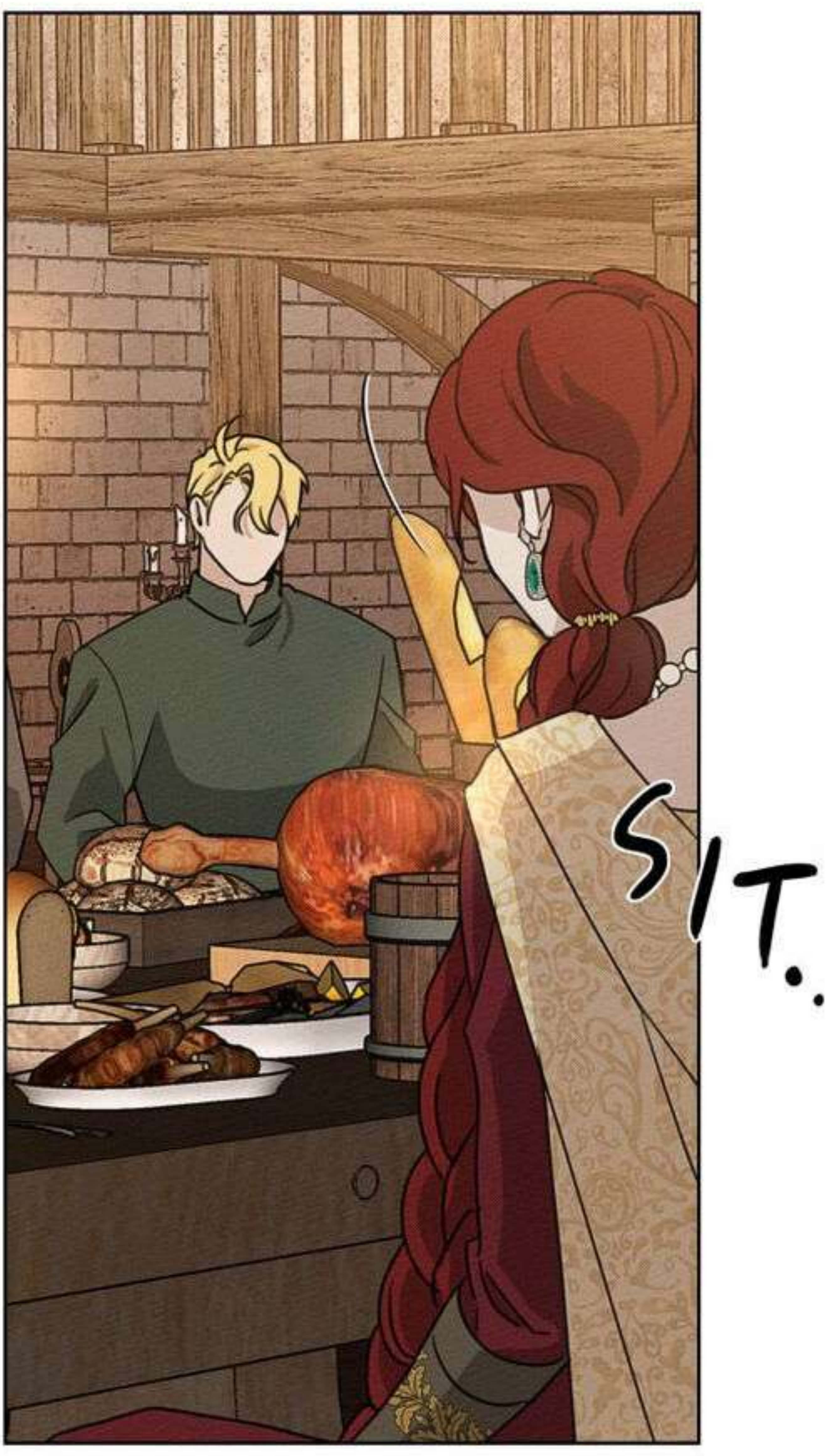
CREAK..

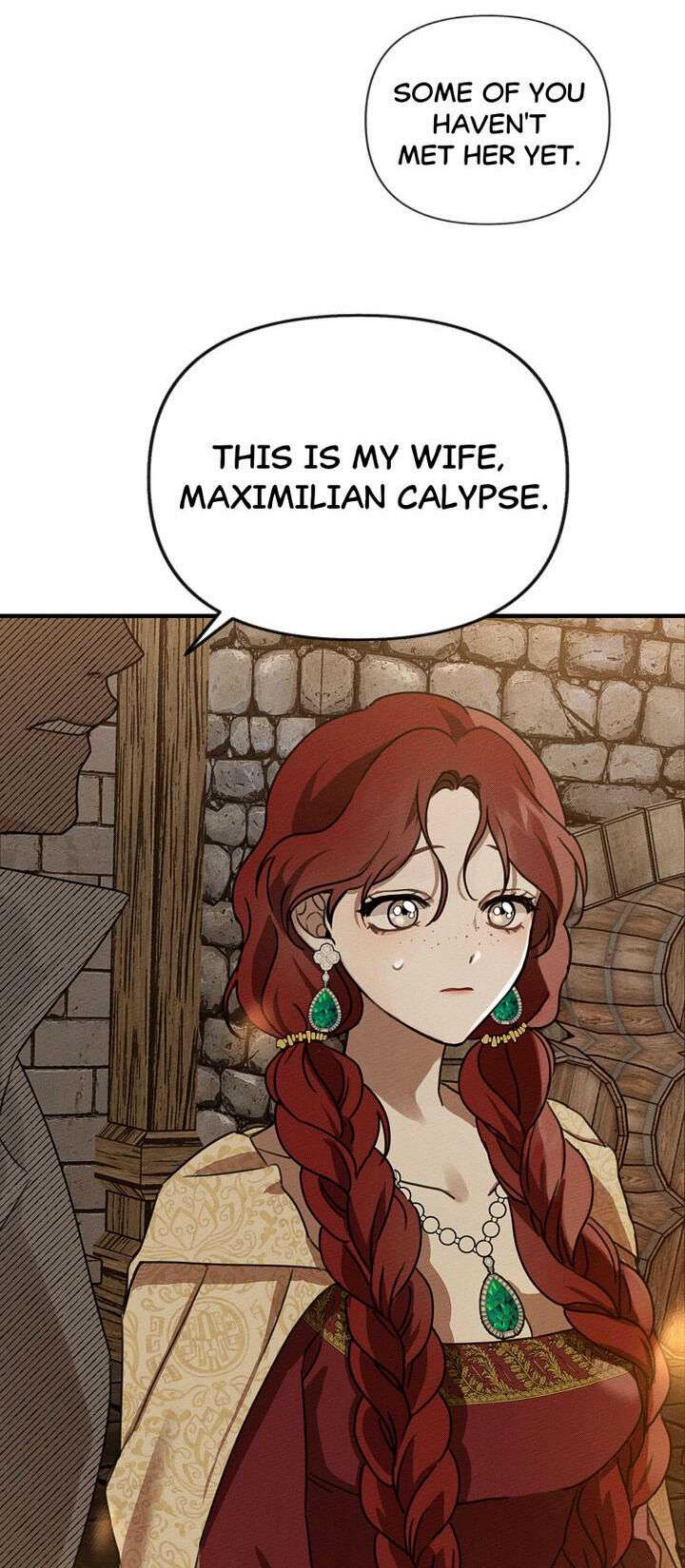

CHATTER
CHATTER
WOW!
CHATTER
BAHAHA!
NICE—

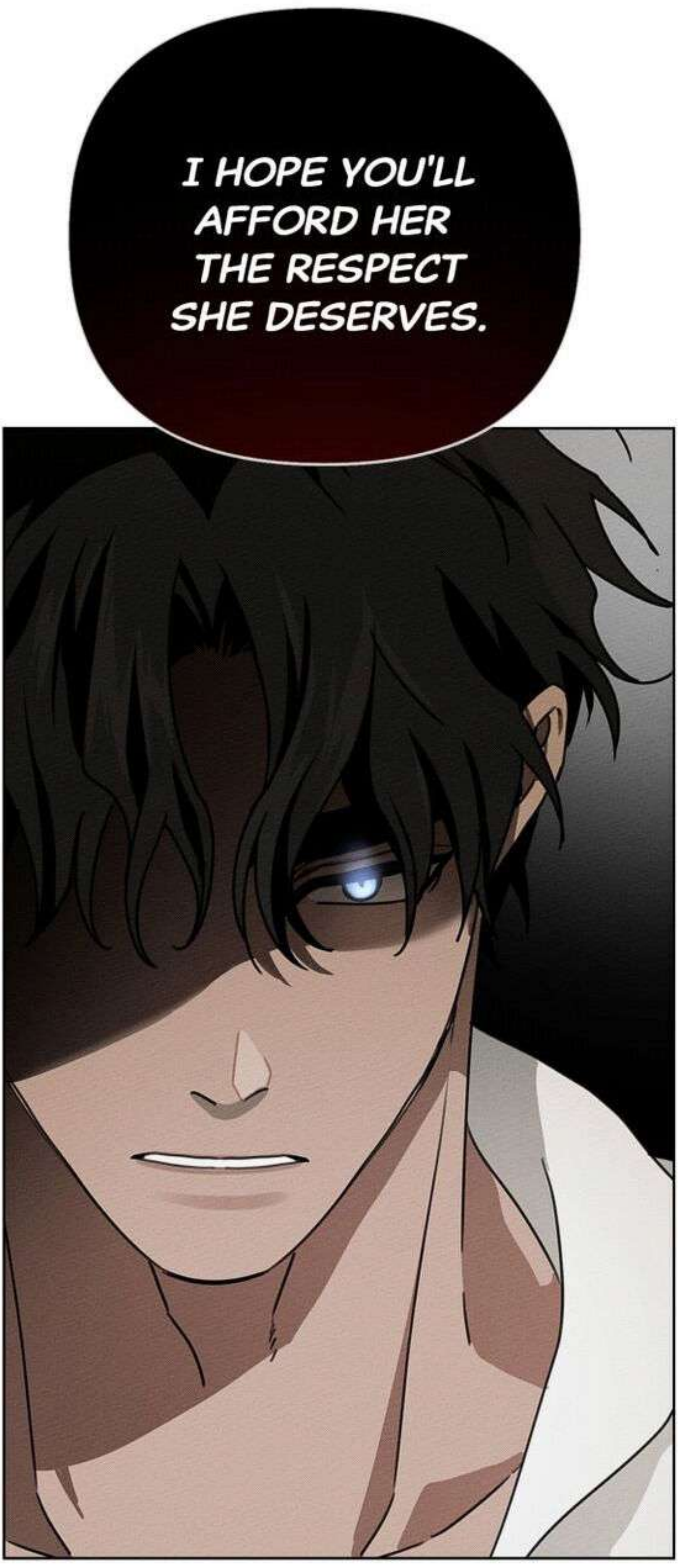

MAXI!

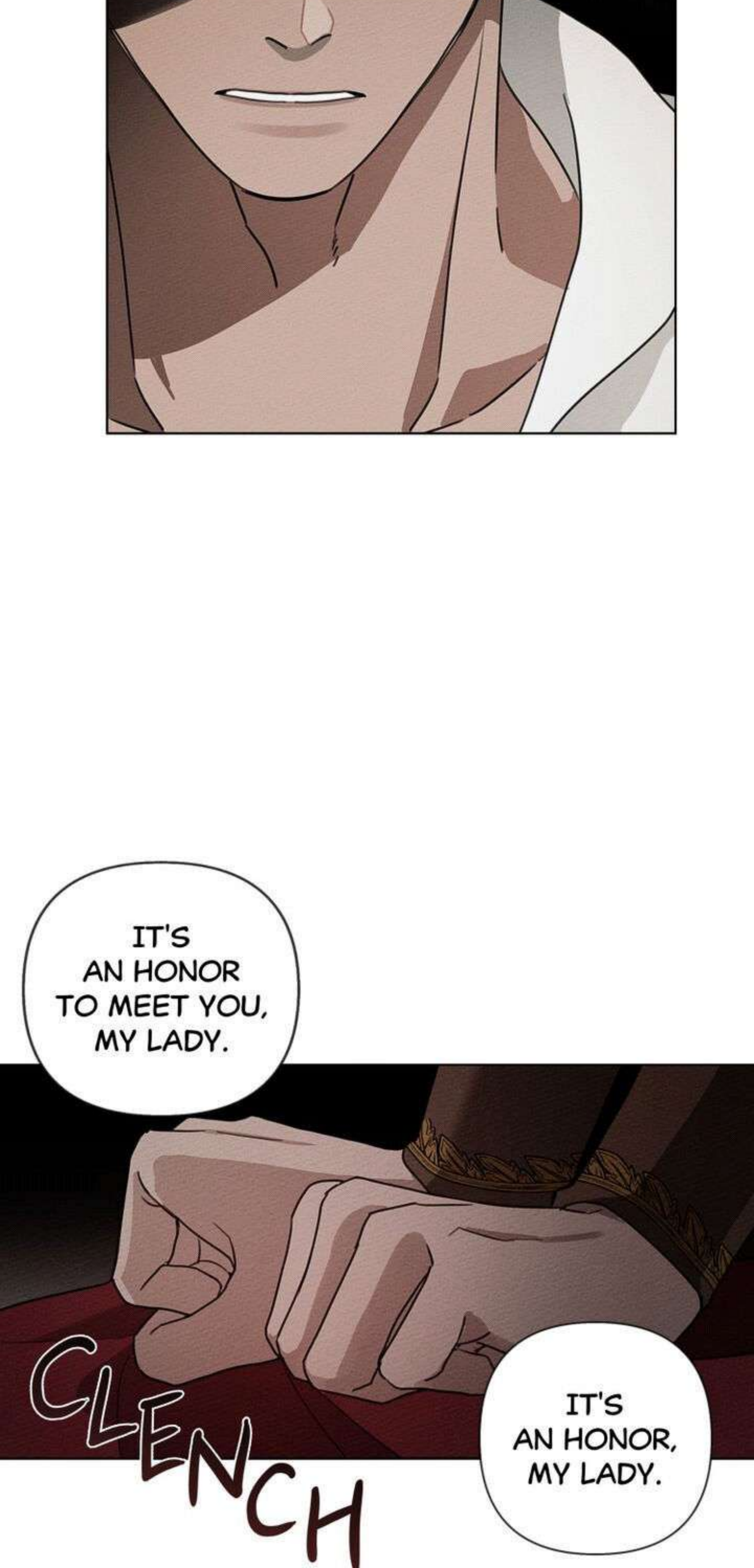

COME HERE.

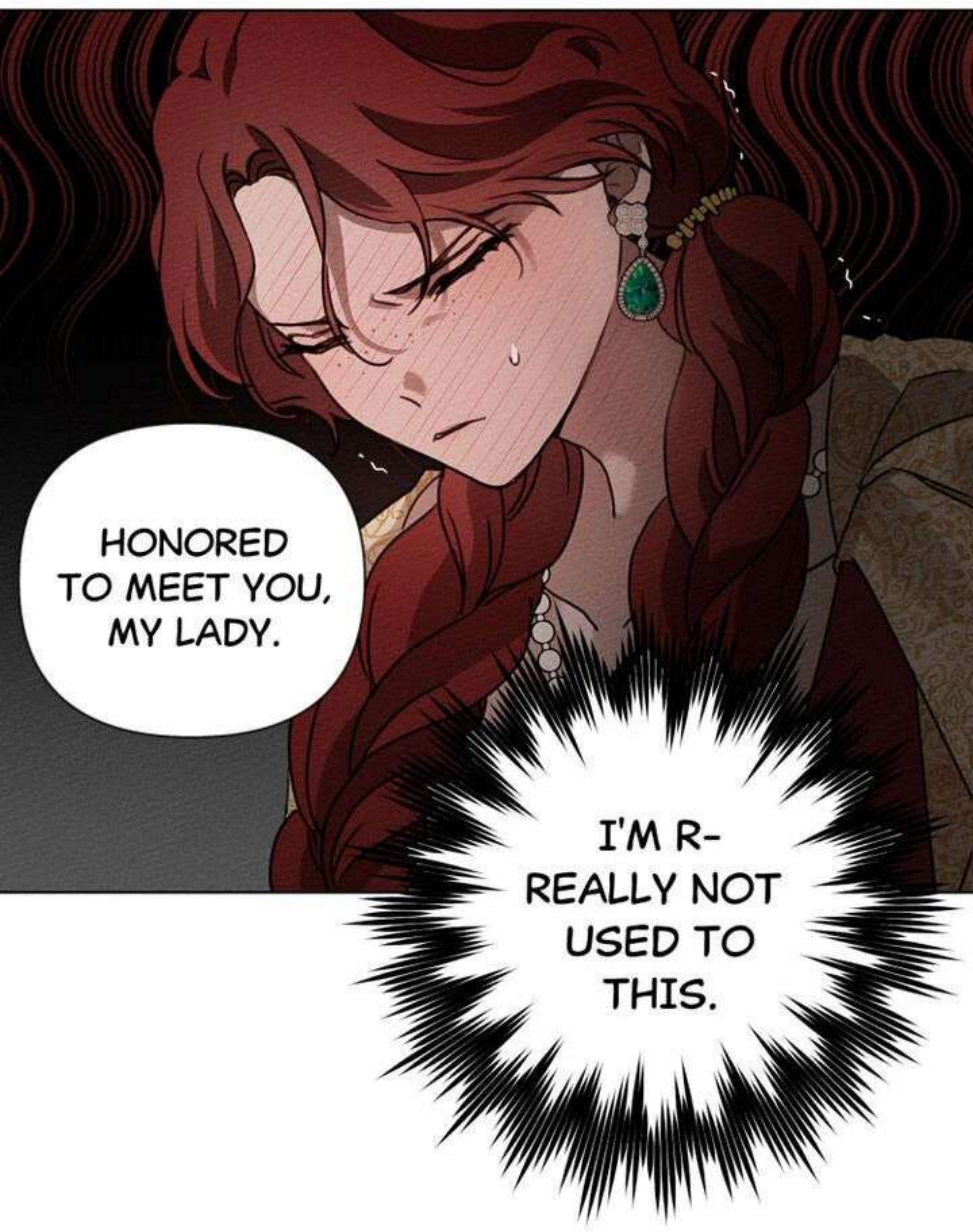

SILENCE——...

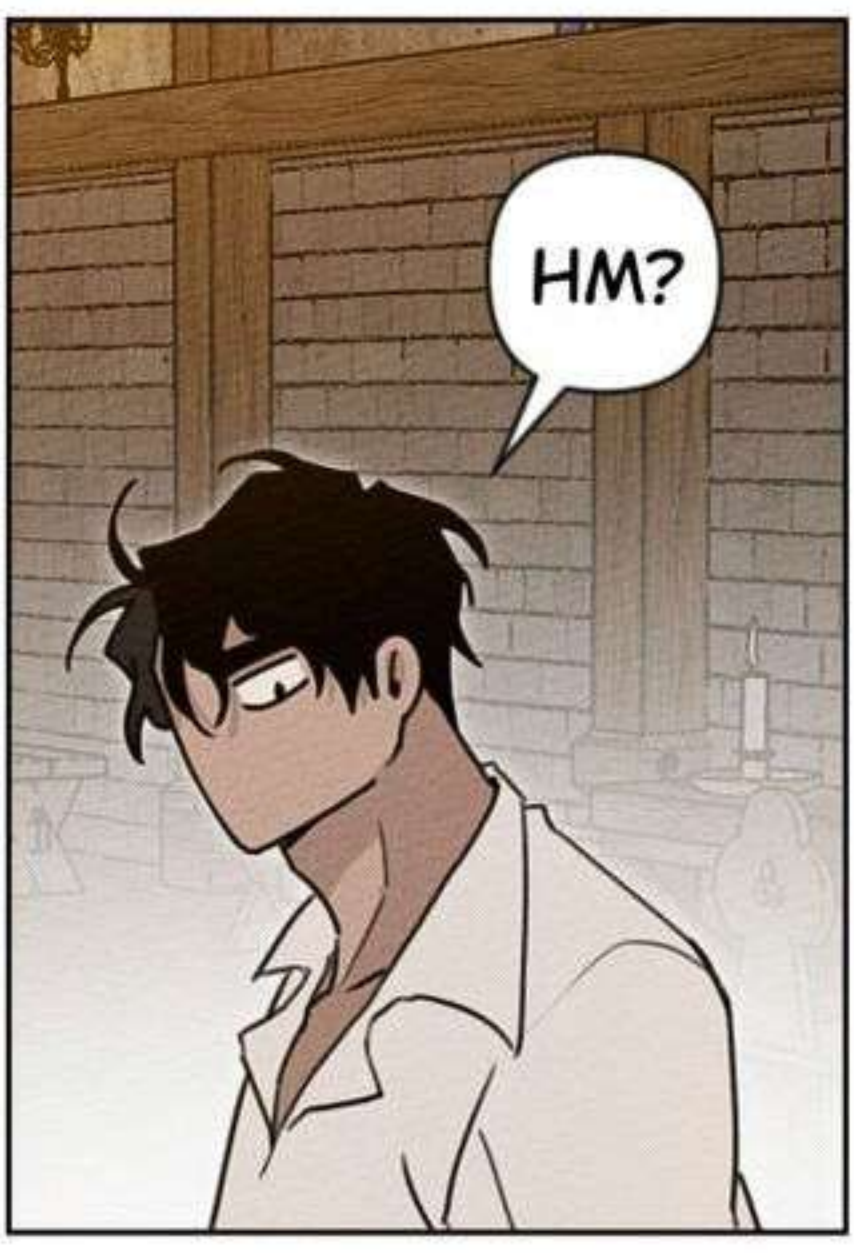

SIT..

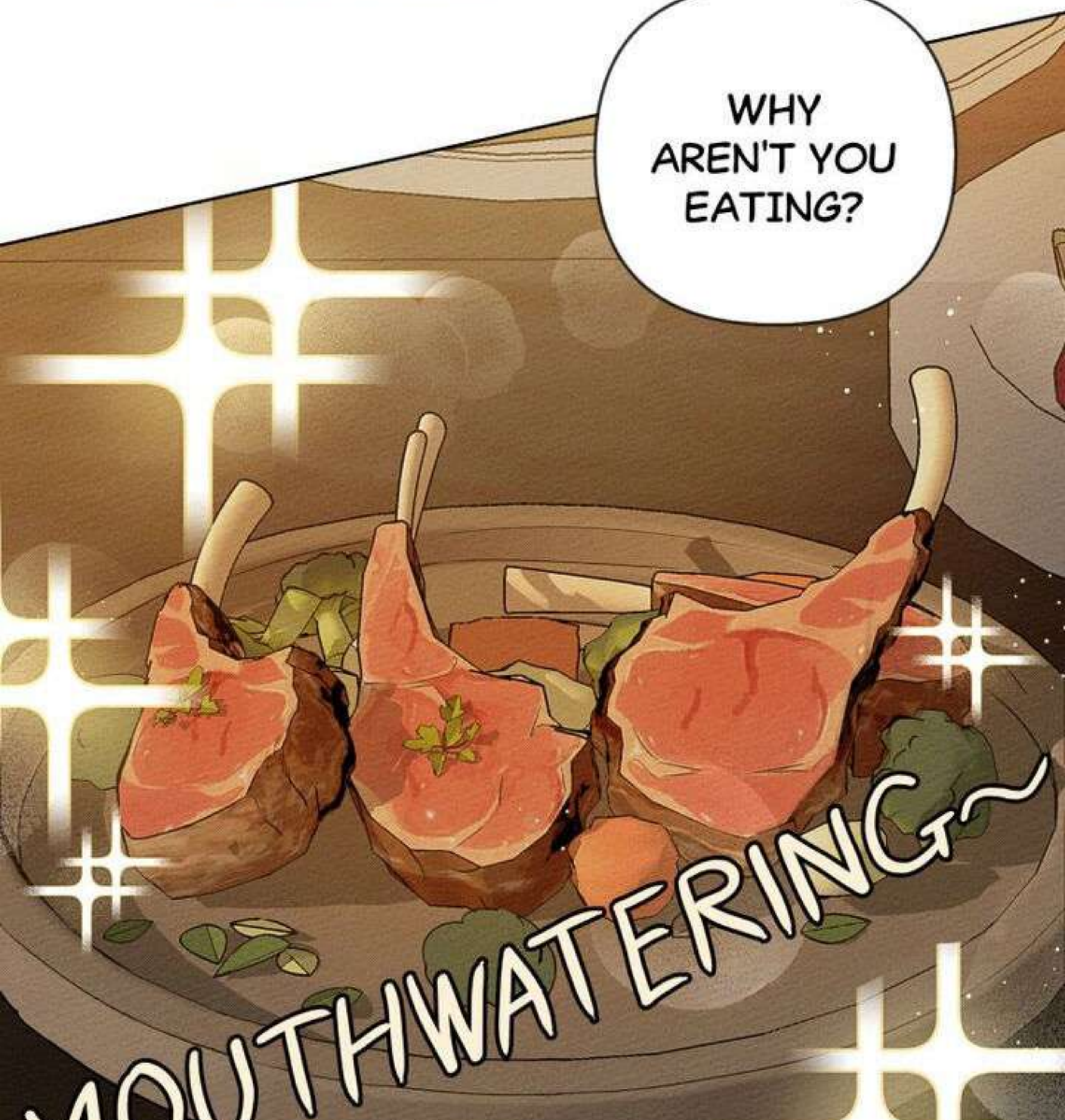

SOME OF YOU HAVEN'T MET HER YET.
THIS IS MY WIFE, MAXIMILIAN CALYPSE.

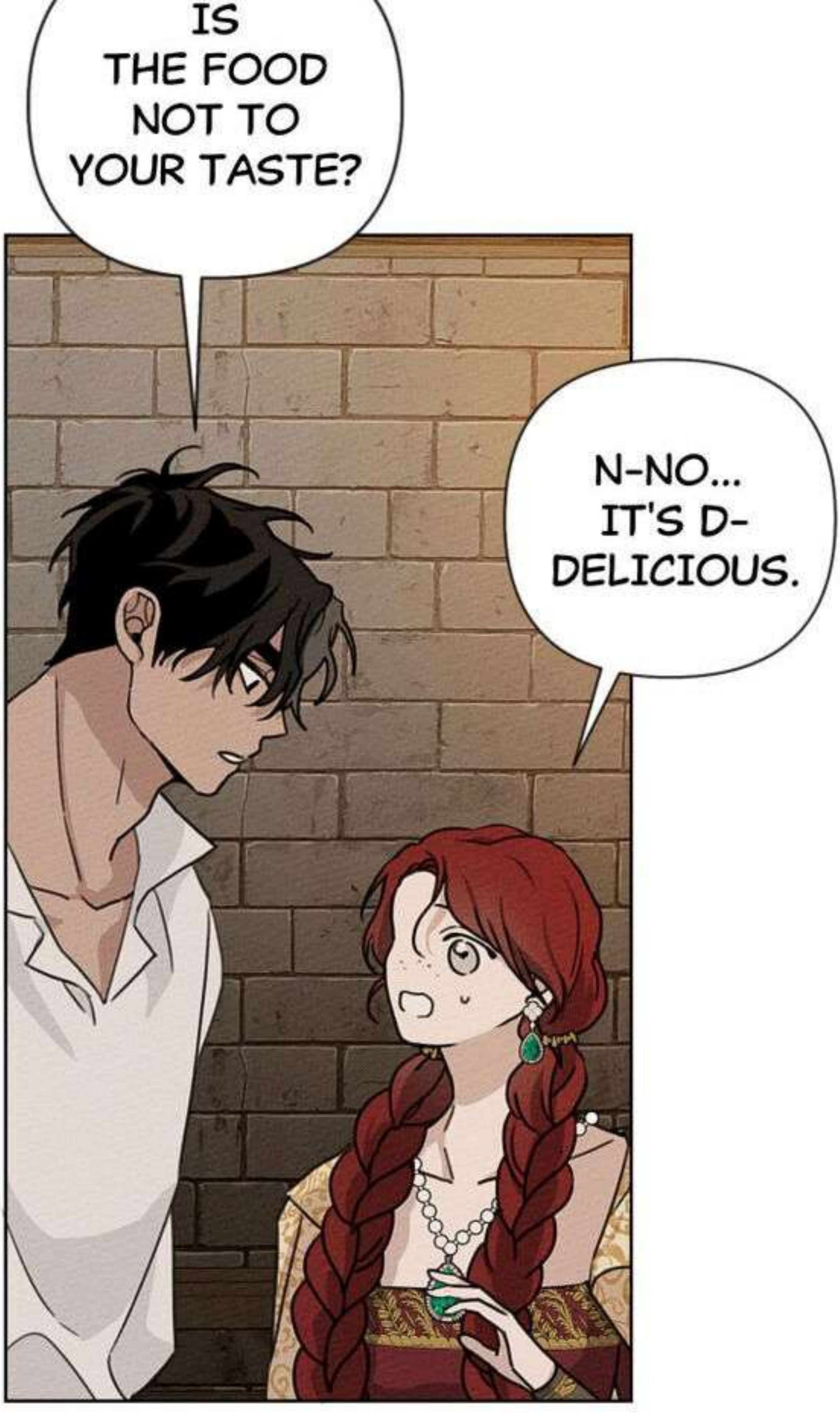

I HOPE YOU'LL AFFORD HER THE RESPECT SHE DESERVES.

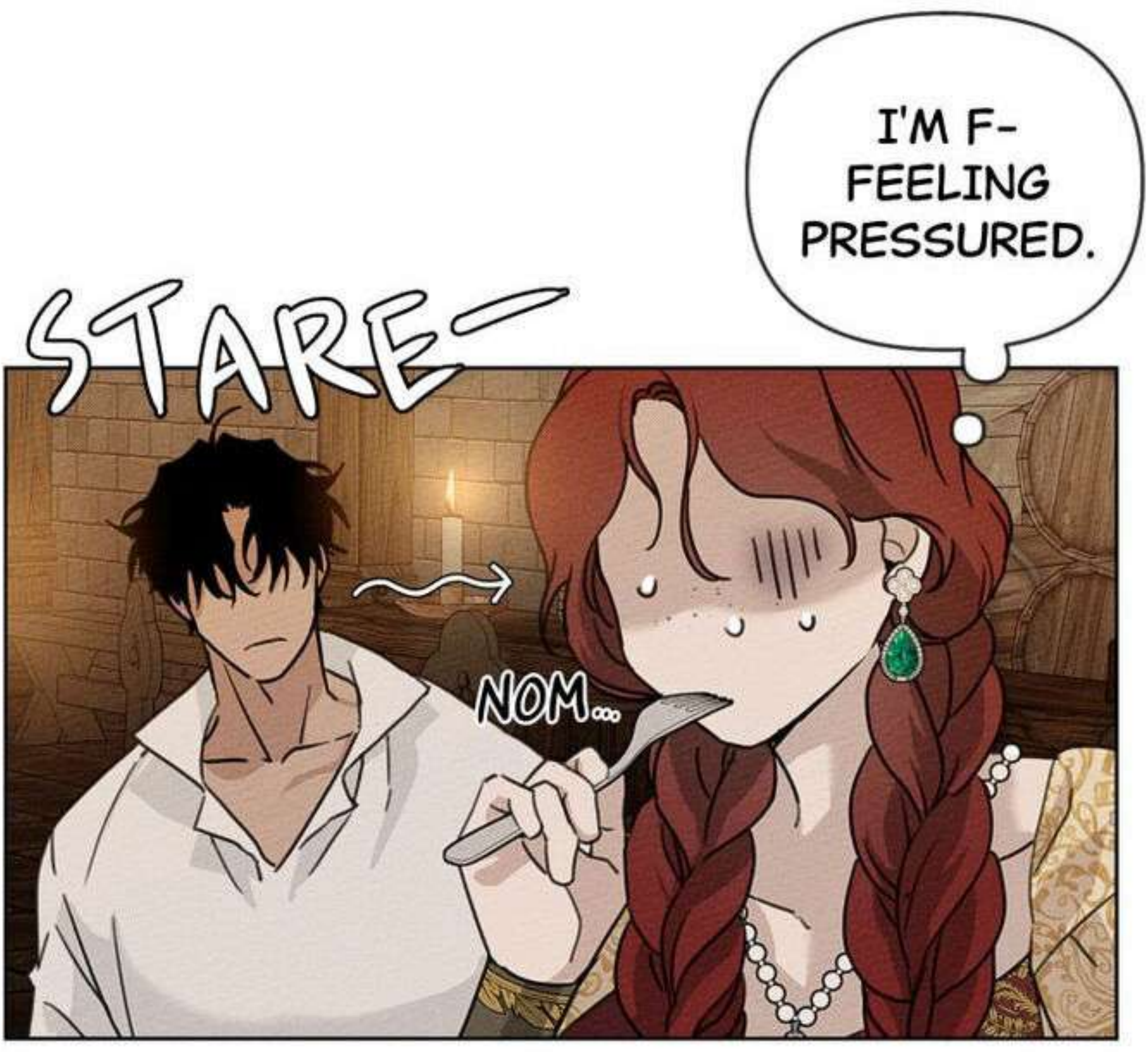

IT'S AN HONOR TO MEET YOU, MY LADY.
CLENCH
IT'S AN HONOR, MY LADY.

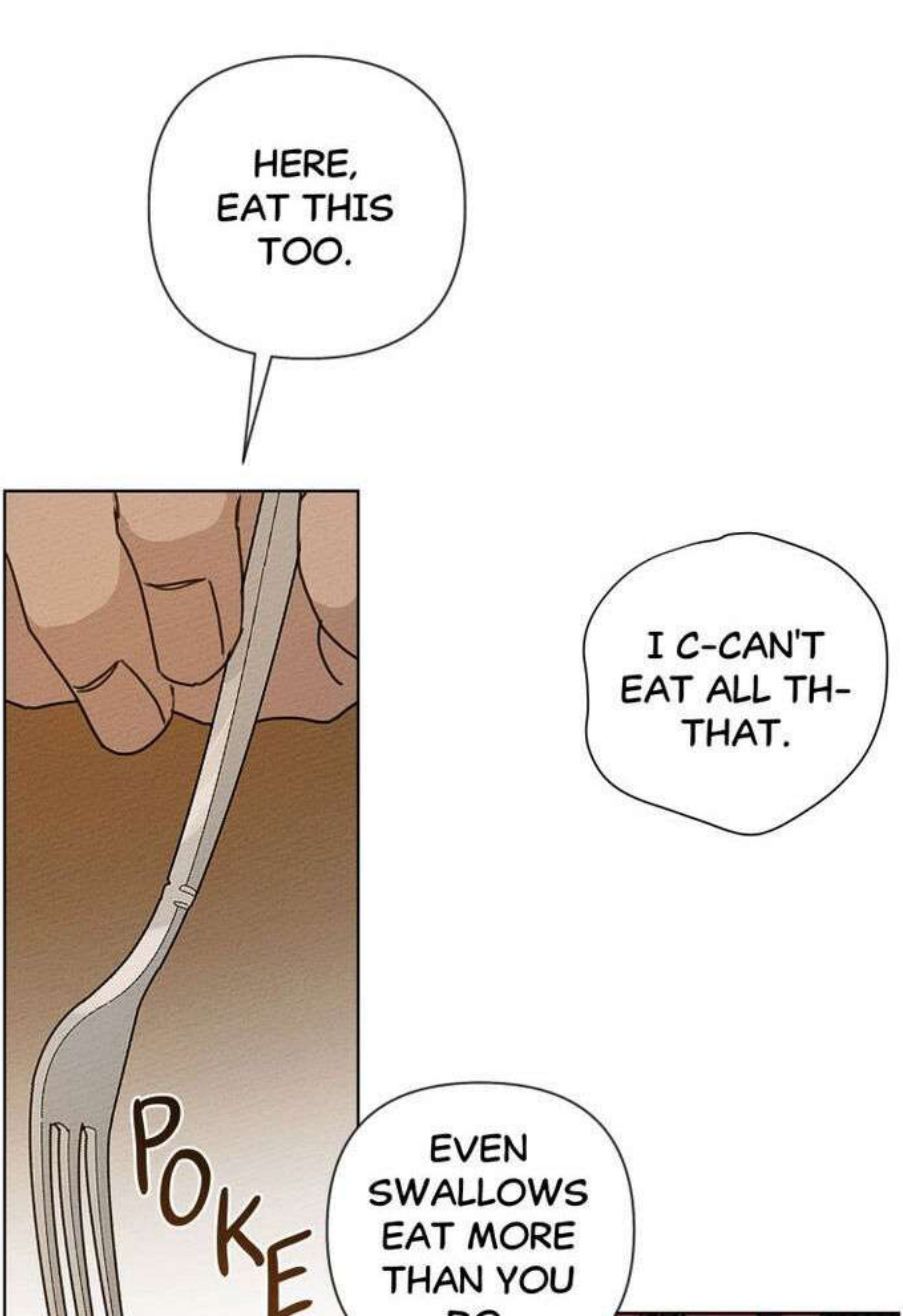

HONORED TO MEET YOU, MY LADY.
I'M R- REALLY NOT USED TO THIS.

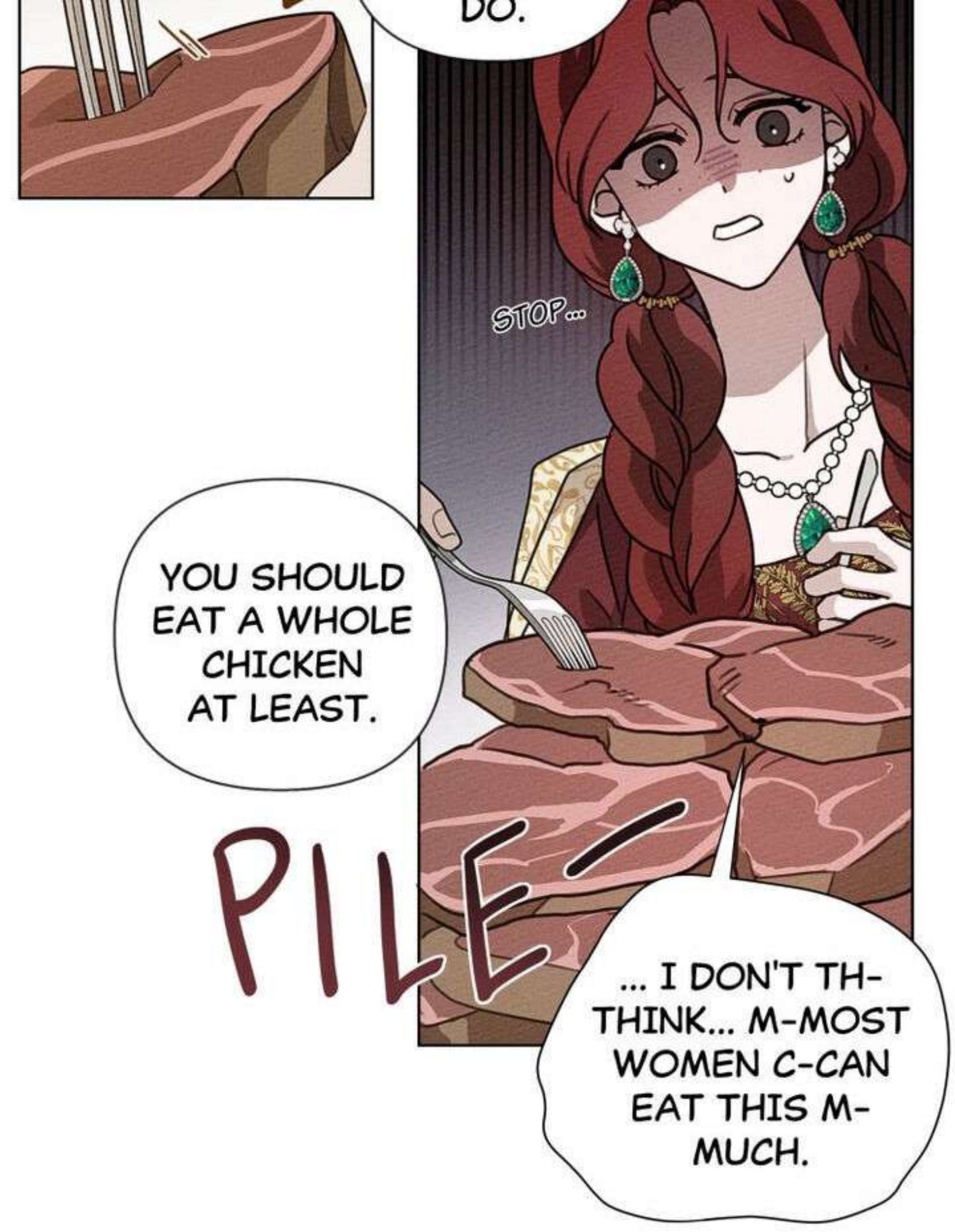

HM?

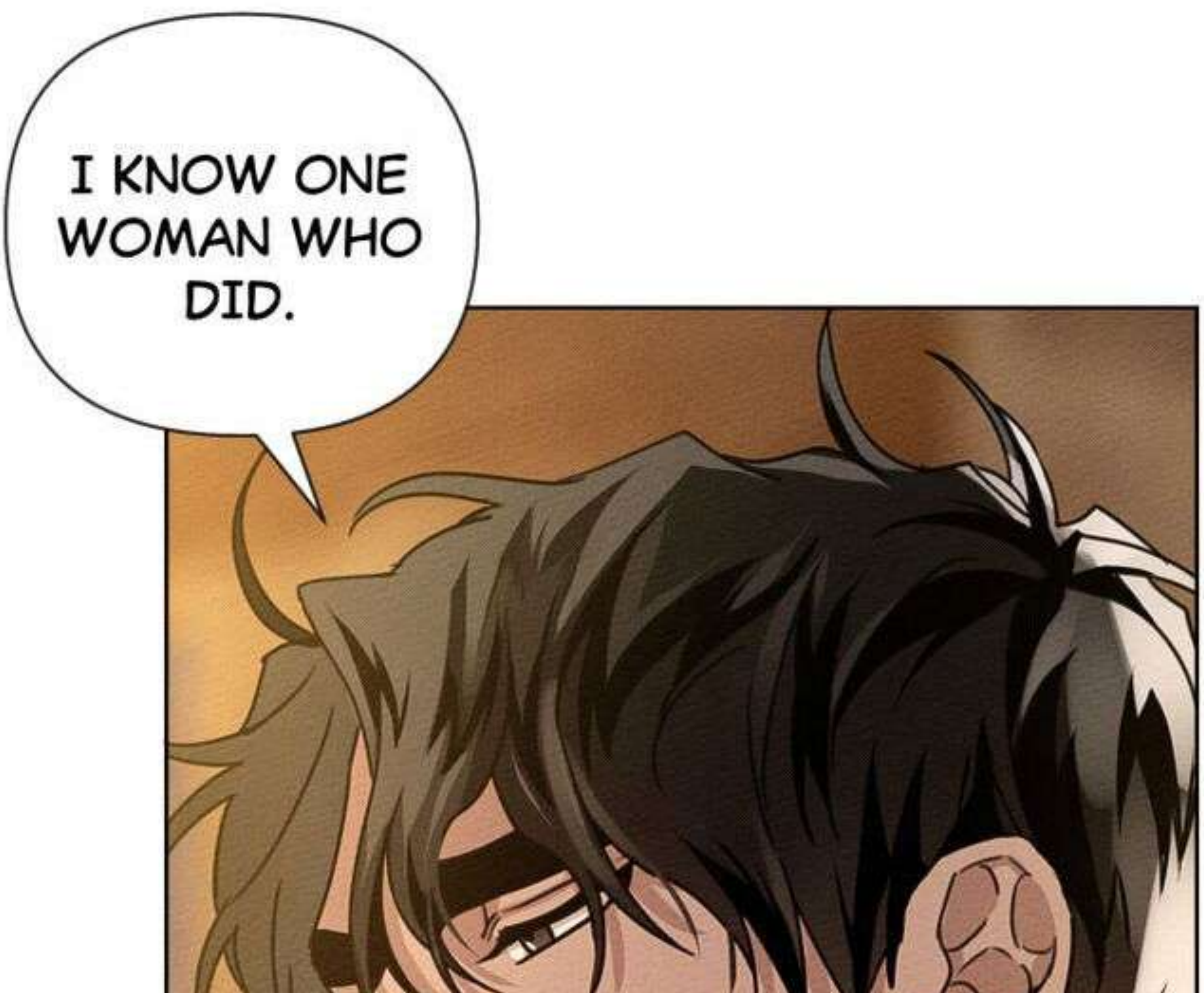

WHY AREN'T YOU EATING?
MOUTHWATERING~


IS THE FOOD NOT TO YOUR TASTE?
N-NO... IT'S D-DELICIOUS.


STARE—
I'M F-FEELING PRESSURED.
NOM...

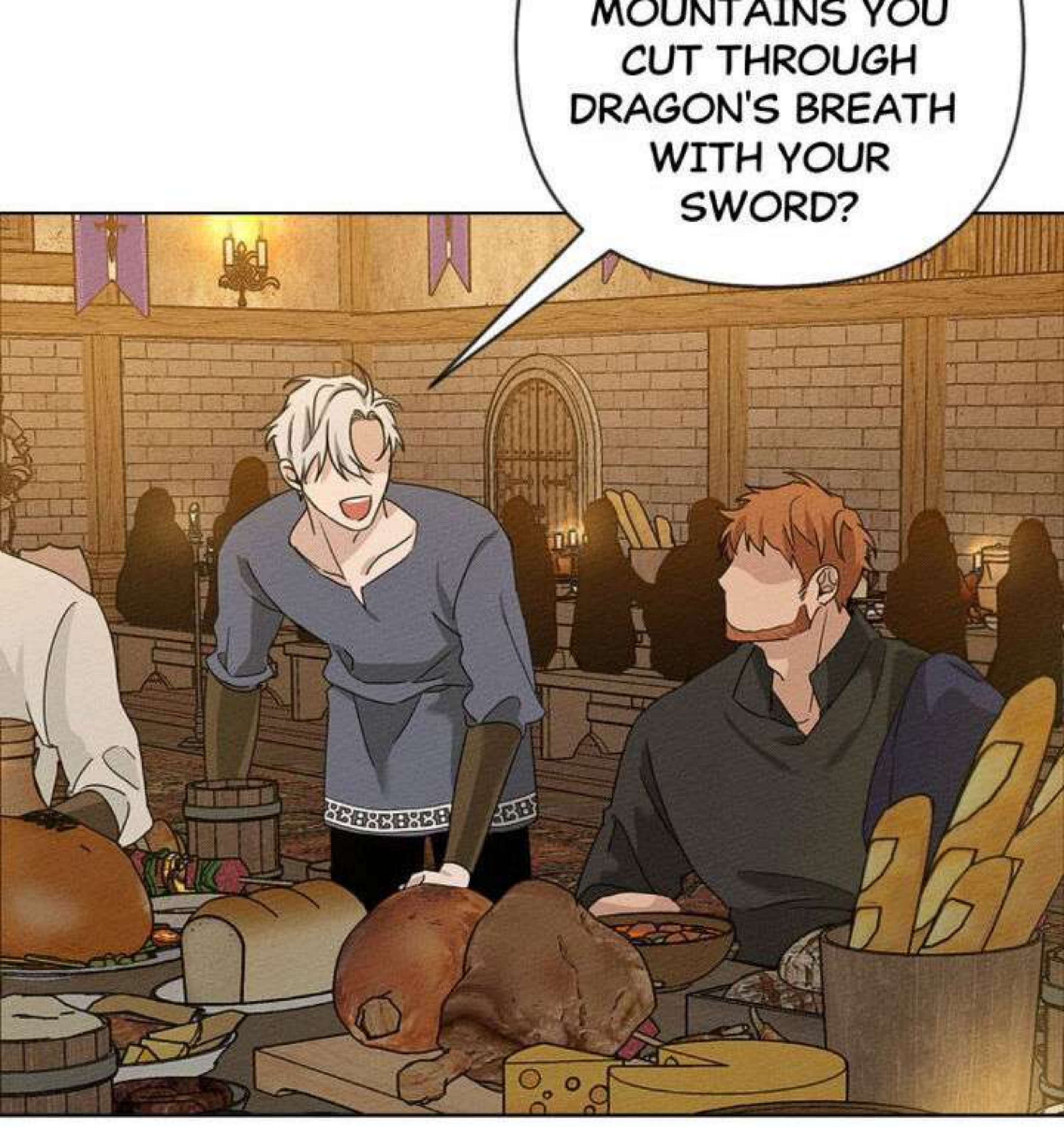

HERE, EAT THIS TOO.
I C-CAN'T EAT ALL TH-THAT.
POKE
EVEN SWALLOWS EAT MORE THAN YOU

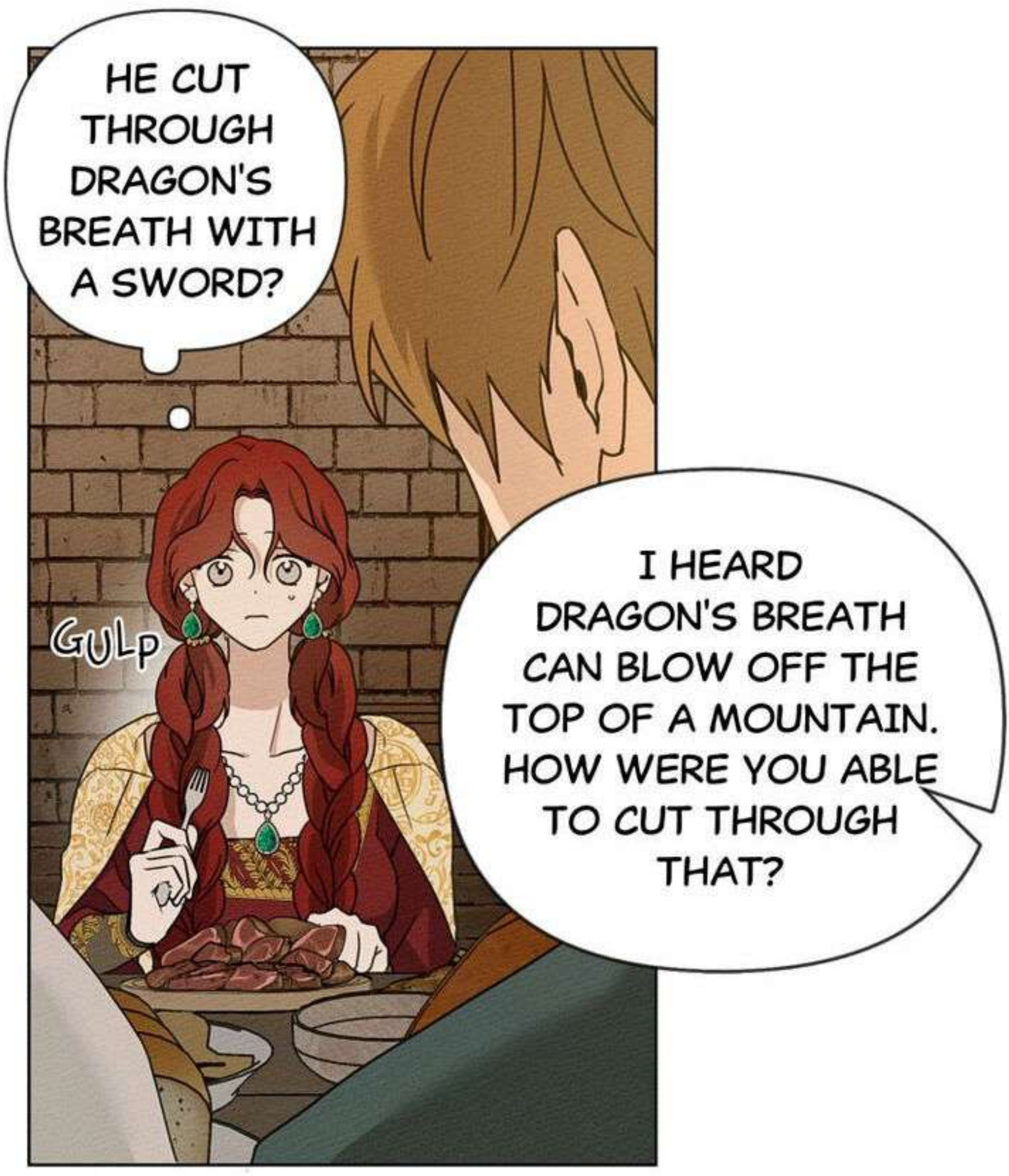

DO.
STOP...
YOU SHOULD EAT A WHOLE CHICKEN AT LEAST.
PILE—
... I DON'T TH- THINK... M-MOST WOMEN C-CAN EAT THIS M- MUCH.

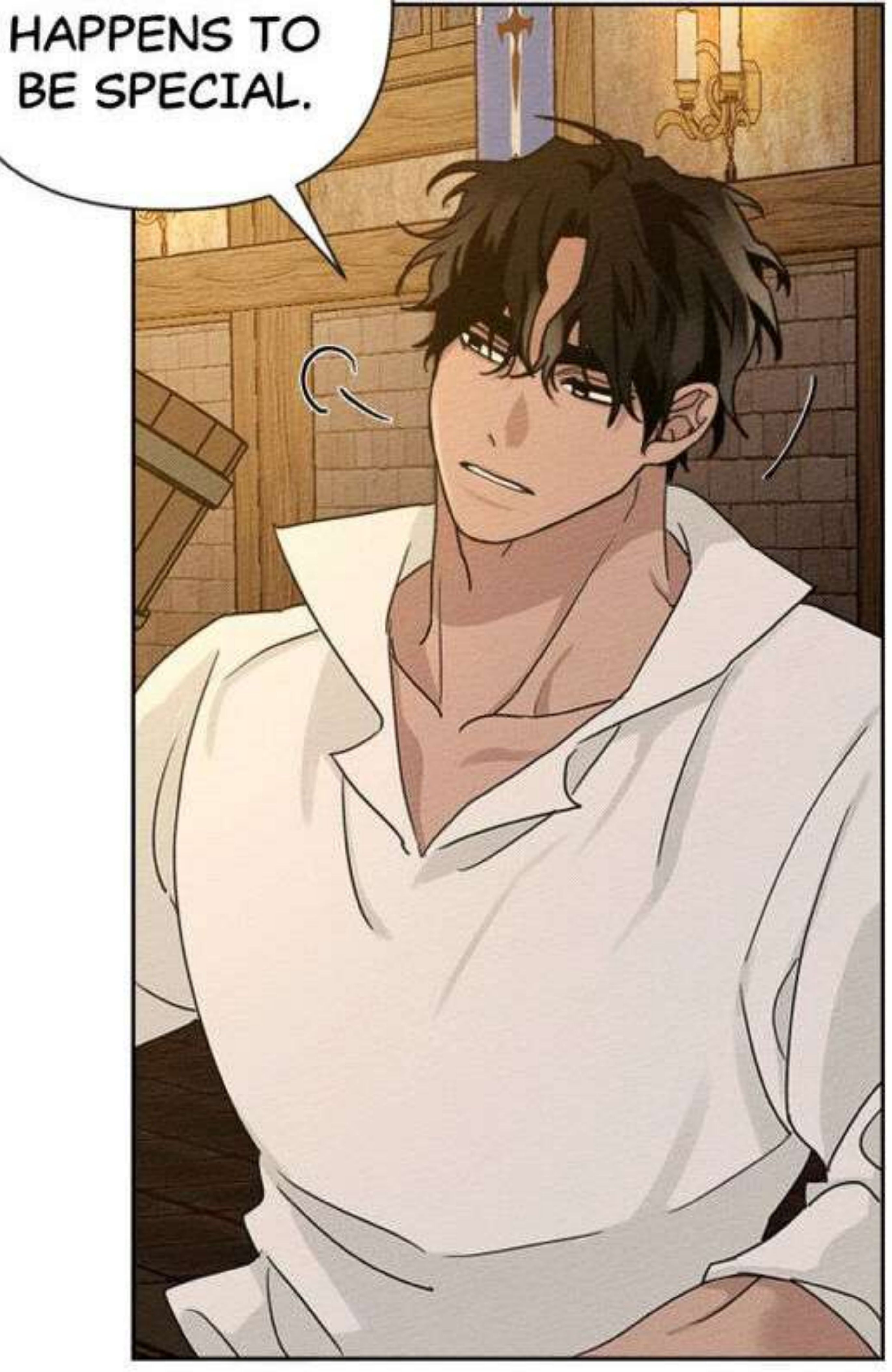

I KNOW ONE WOMAN WHO DID.

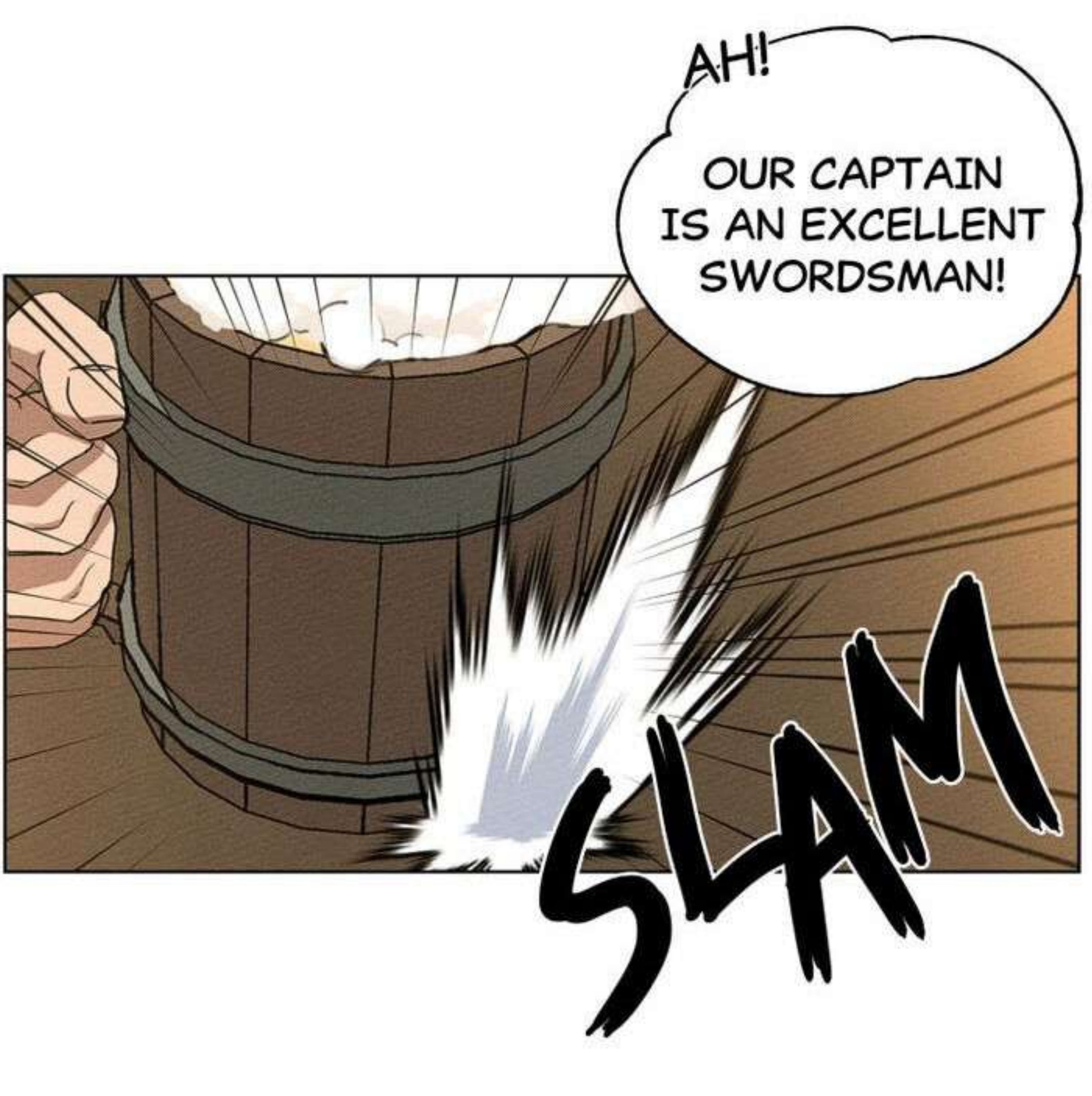
CLENCH

I-
I'LL EAT A LITTLE MORE.
TRY EATING MORE EACH DAY. YOU LOOK SO FRAIL.
IT'S BOTHERING ME.
BITE
WHO'S THE WOMAN HE'S REFERRING TO?
SIR RIFTAN!
IS IT TRUE THAT IN THE LEXOS MOUNTAINS YOU

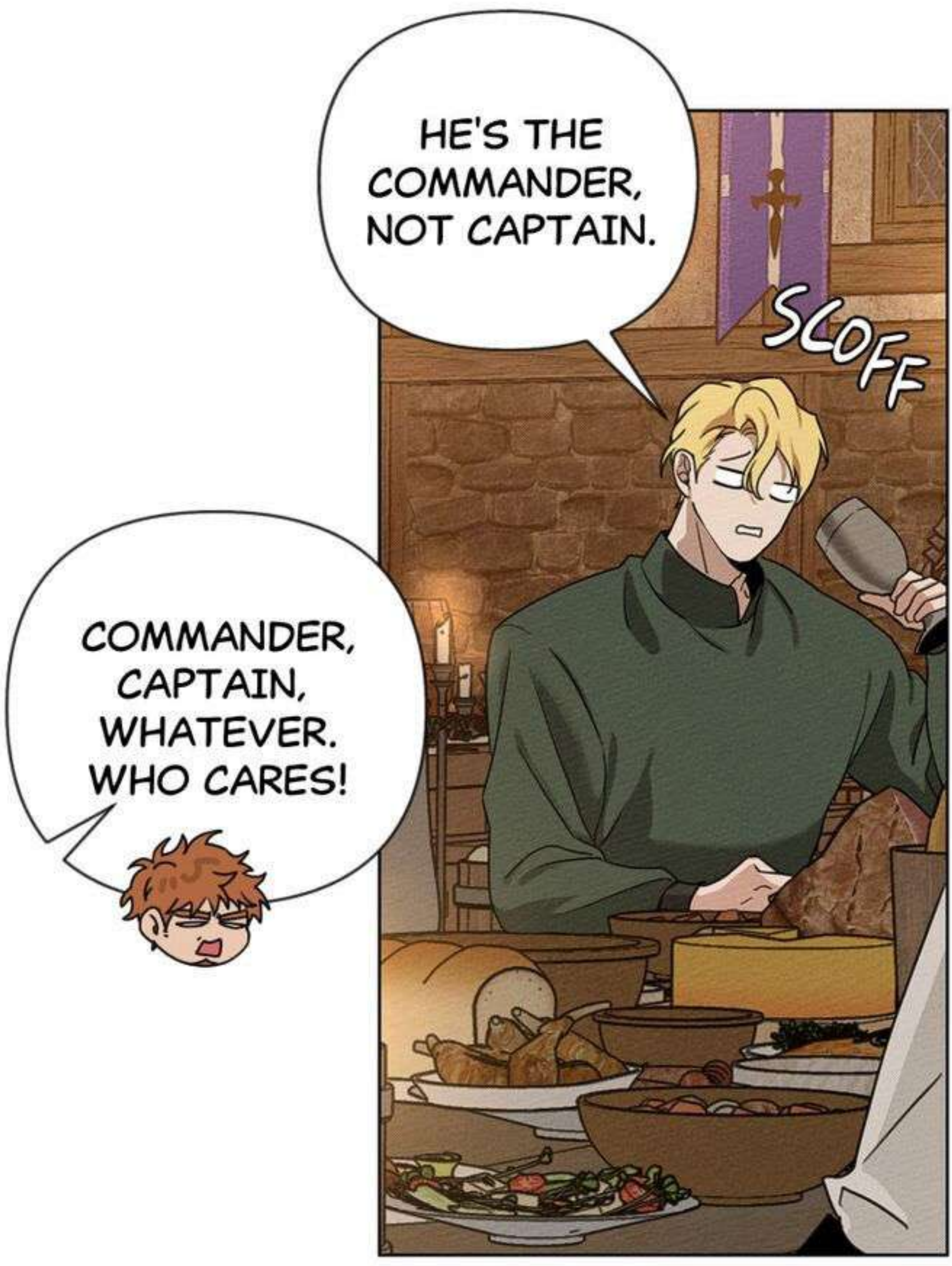

MOUNTAINS YOU CUT THROUGH DRAGON'S BREATH WITH YOUR SWORD?

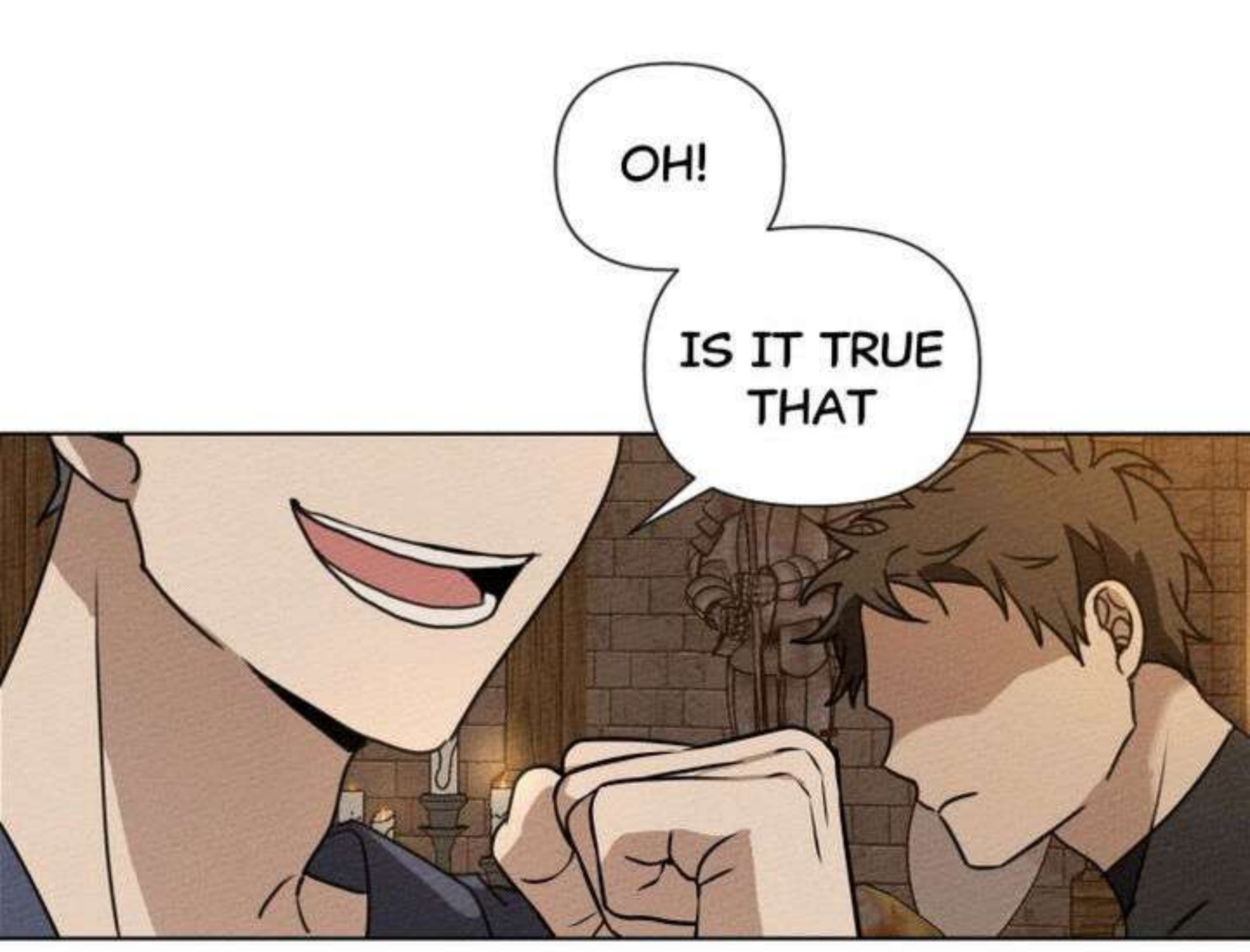

HE CUT THROUGH DRAGON'S BREATH WITH A SWORD?
GULP
I HEARD DRAGON'S BREATH CAN BLOW OFF THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN. HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO CUT THROUGH THAT?

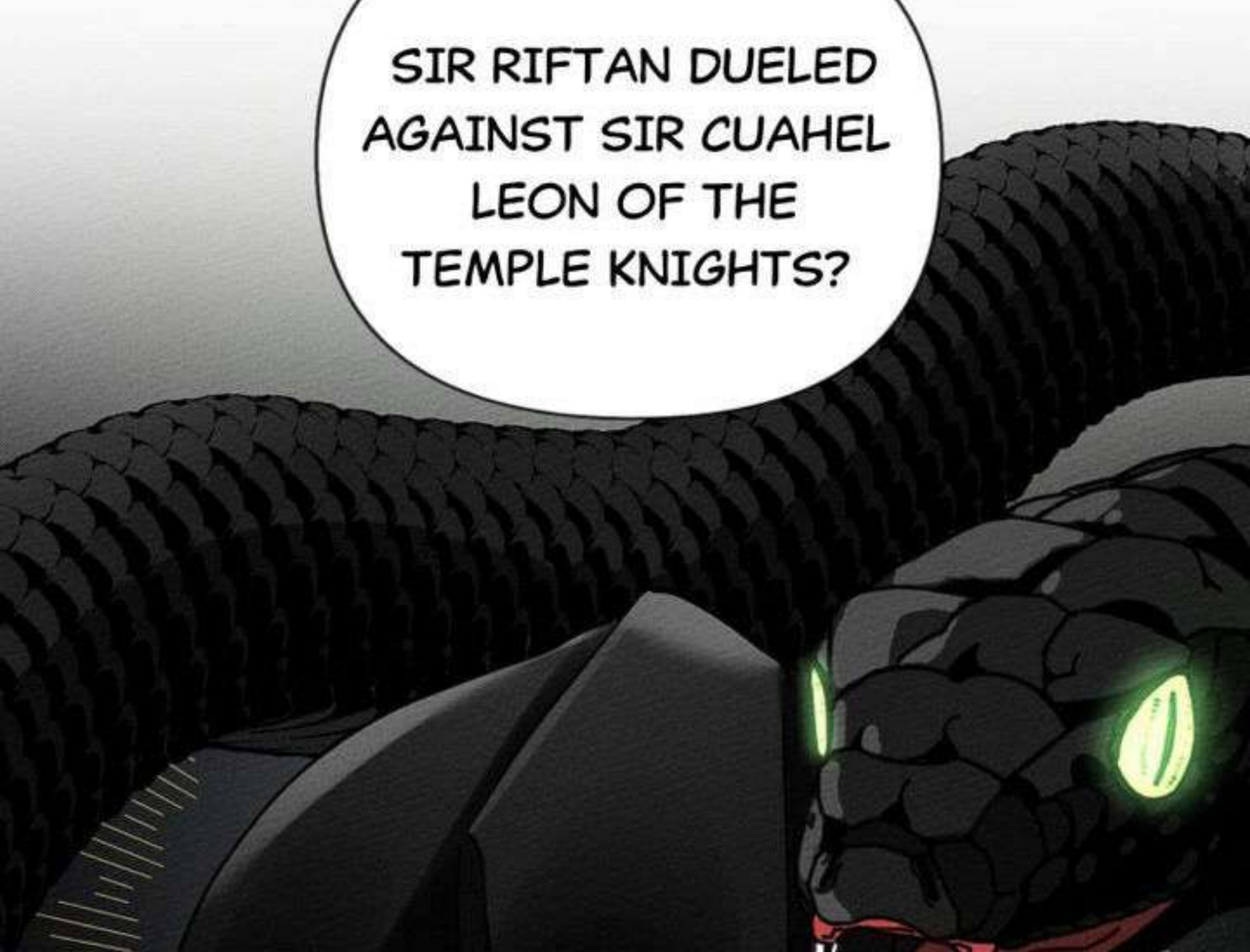

MY SWORD JUST SO HAPPENS TO BE SPECIAL.

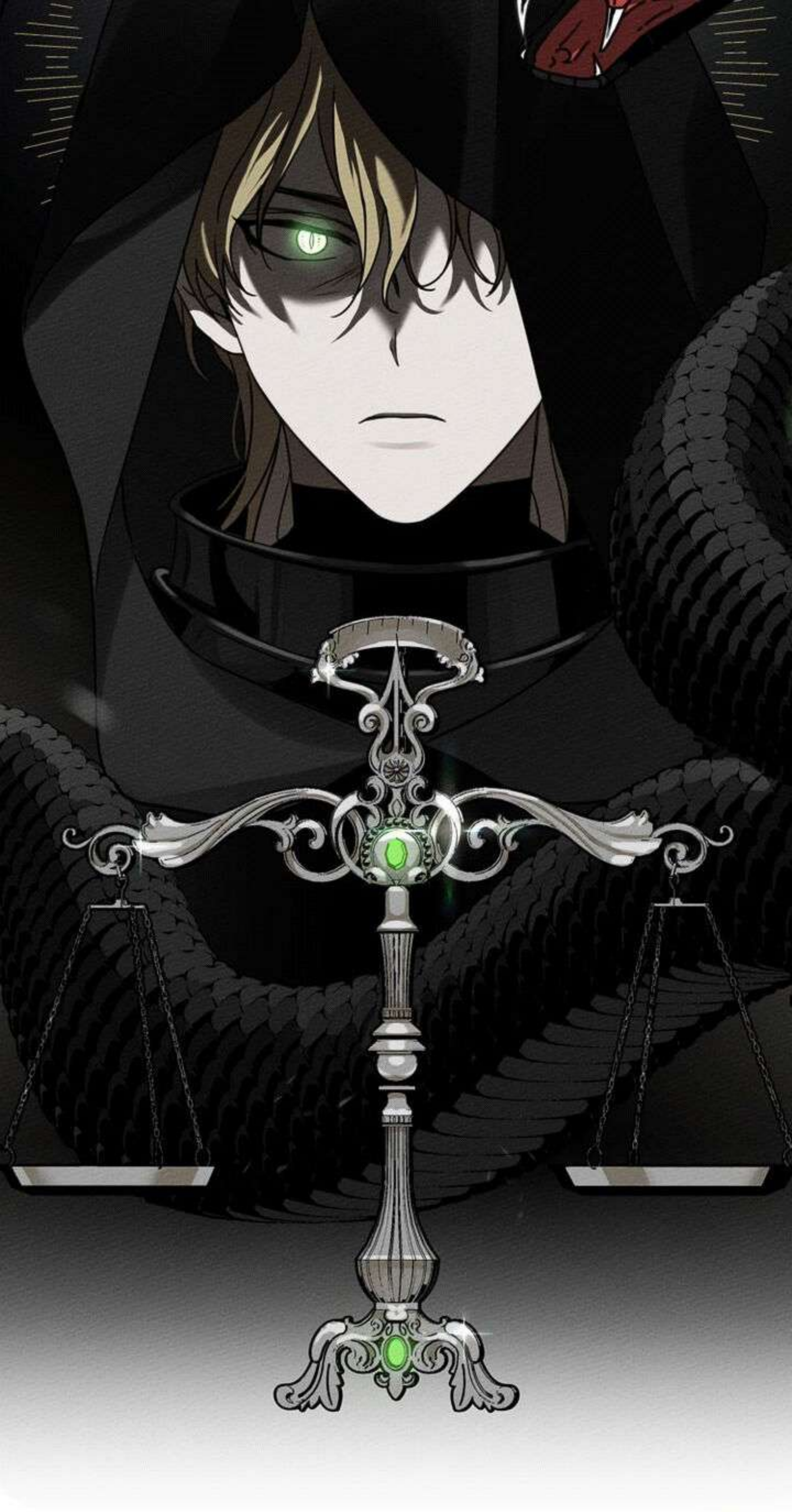

AH!
OUR CAPTAIN IS AN EXCELLENT SWORDSMAN!
SLAM

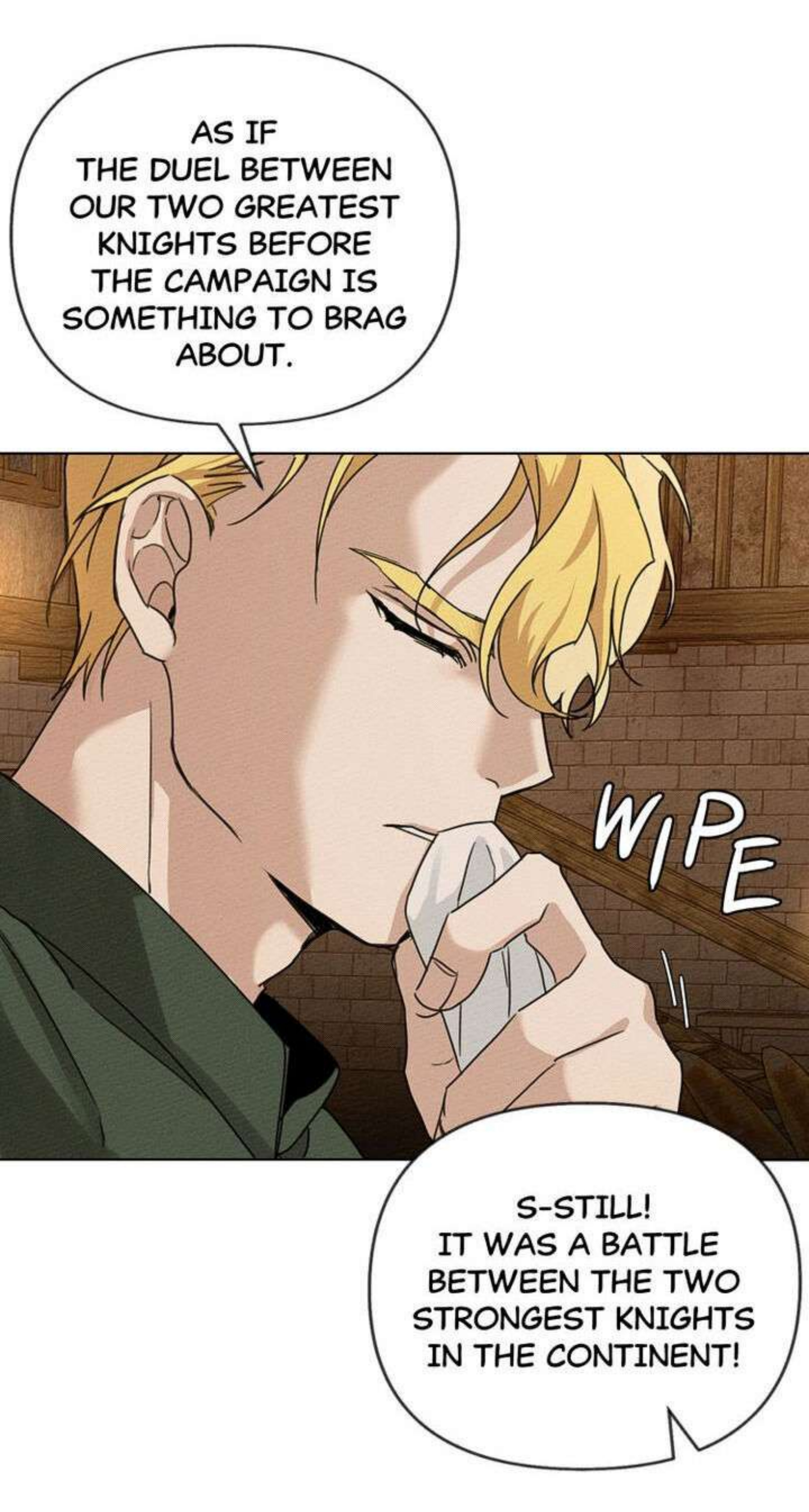
BUT HIS SWORD CAN ABSORB ANY MAGIC IT COMES IN CONTACT WITH.
SO THE STRONGER THE ENEMY'S MAGIC, THE STRONGER HIS SWORD BECOMES.

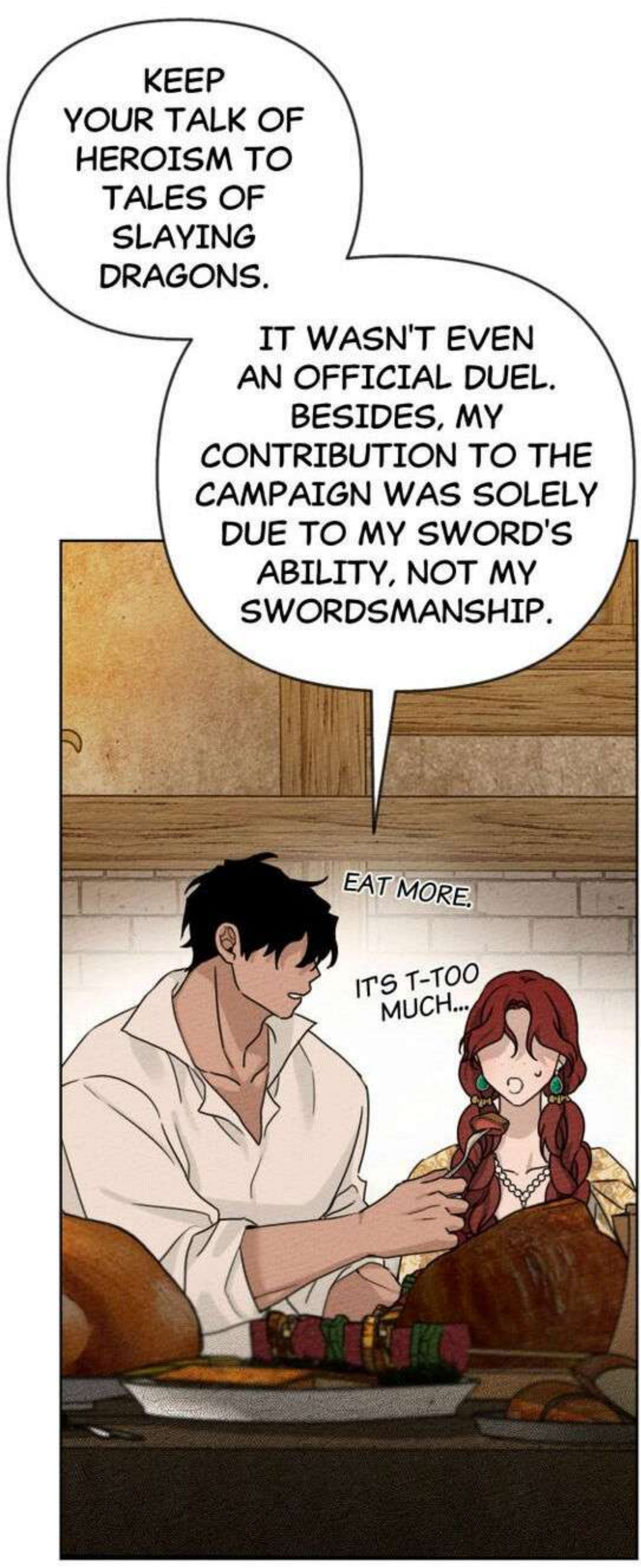

HE'S THE COMMANDER, NOT CAPTAIN.
SCOFF
COMMANDER, CAPTAIN, WHATEVER. WHO CARES!

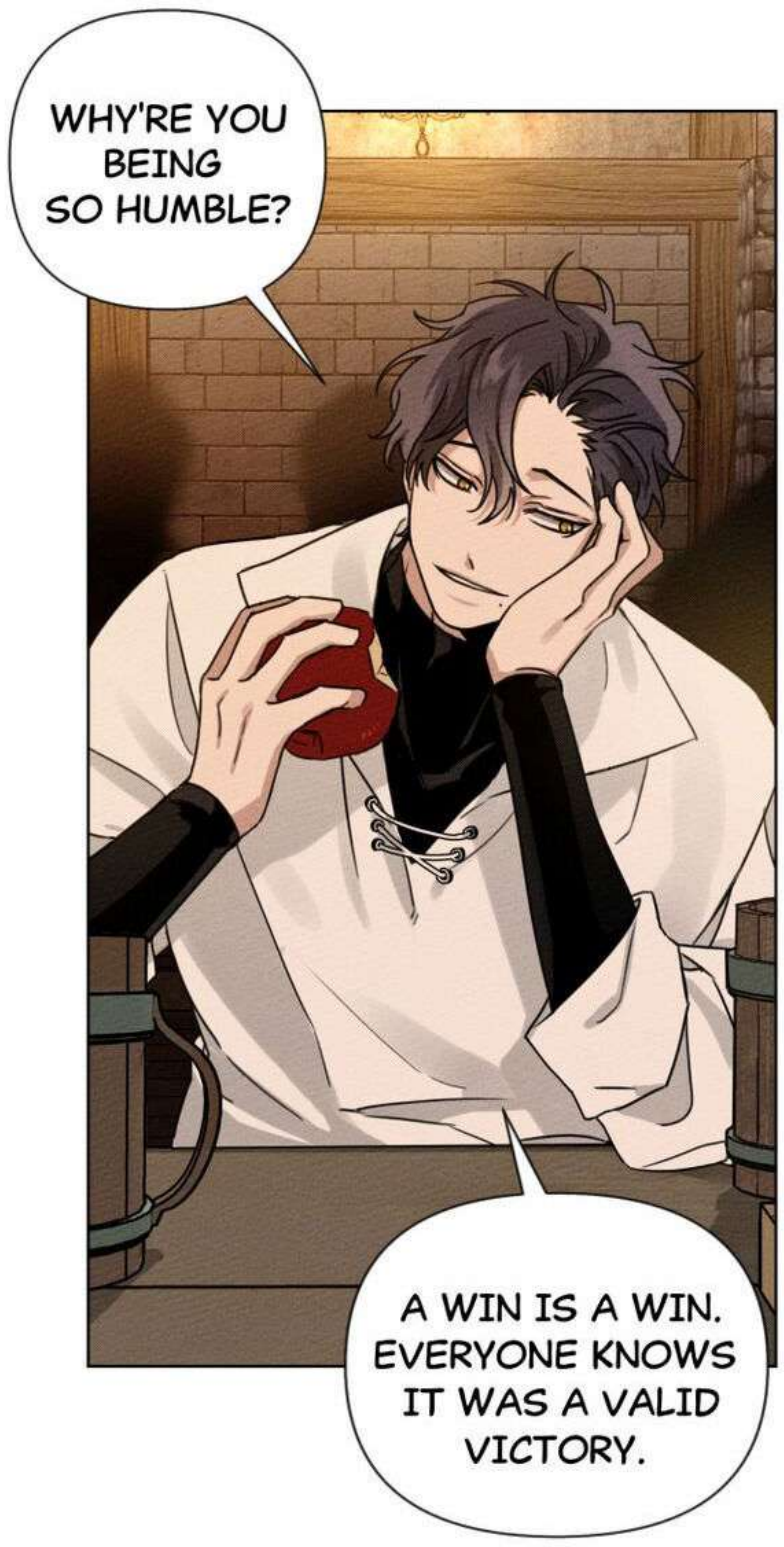

OH!
IS IT TRUE THAT


SIR RIFTAN DUELED AGAINST SIR CUAHEL LEON OF THE TEMPLE KNIGHTS?

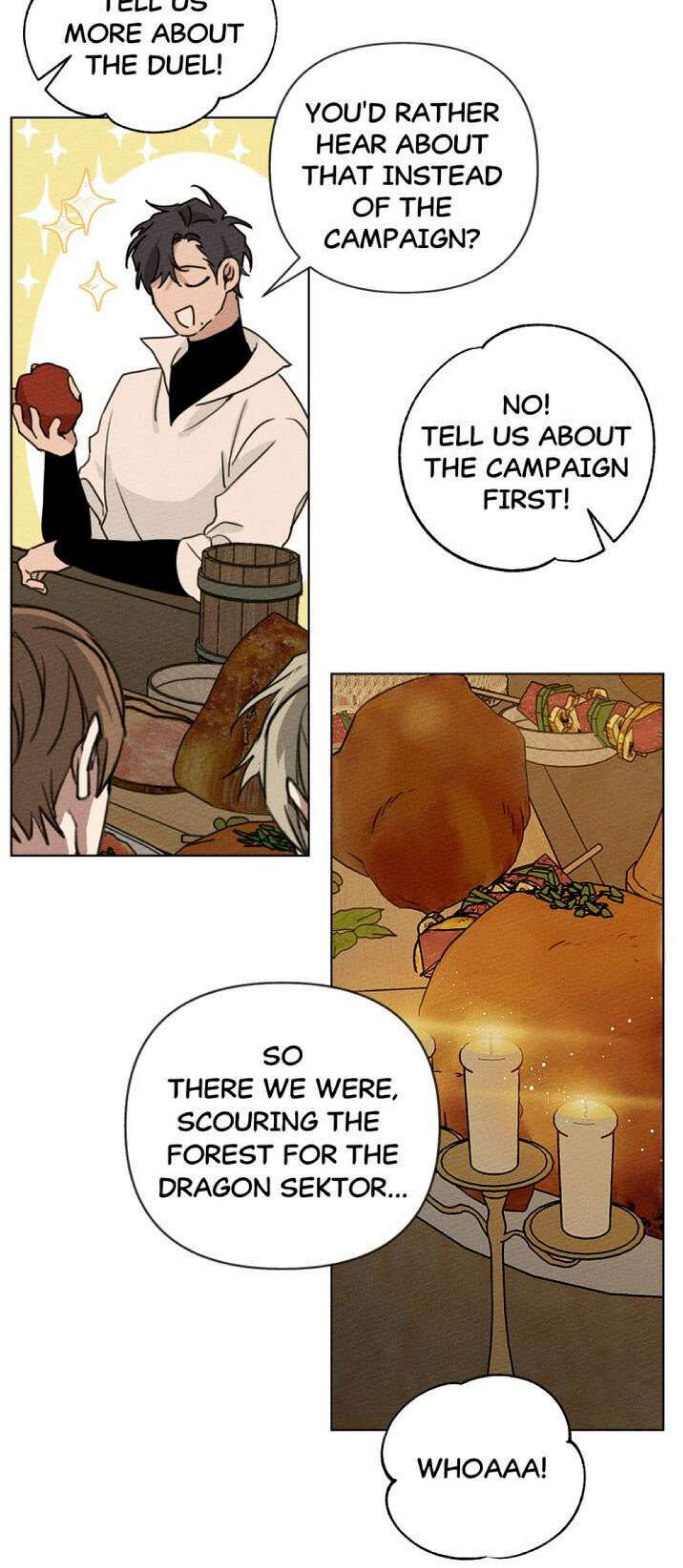


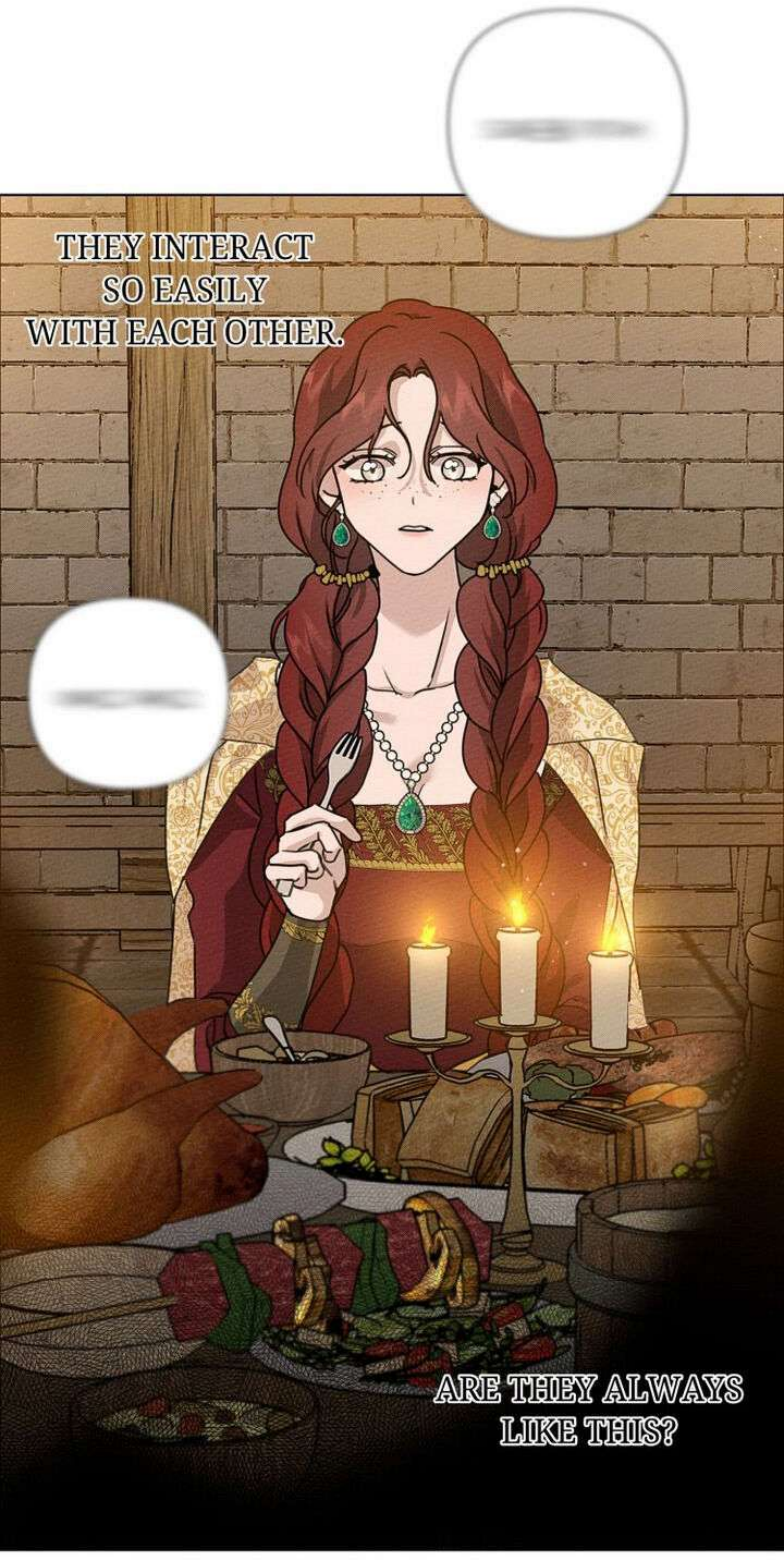

AS IF THE DUEL BETWEEN OUR TWO GREATEST KNIGHTS BEFORE THE CAMPAIGN IS SOMETHING TO BRAG ABOUT.
WIPE
S-STILL! IT WAS A BATTLE BETWEEN THE TWO STRONGEST KNIGHTS IN THE CONTINENT!


KEEP YOUR TALK OF HEROISM TO TALES OF SLAYING DRAGONS.
IT WASN'T EVEN AN OFFICIAL DUEL. BESIDES, MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE CAMPAIGN WAS SOLELY DUE TO MY SWORD'S ABILITY, NOT MY SWORDSMANSHIP.
EAT MORE.
IT'S T-TOO MUCH...

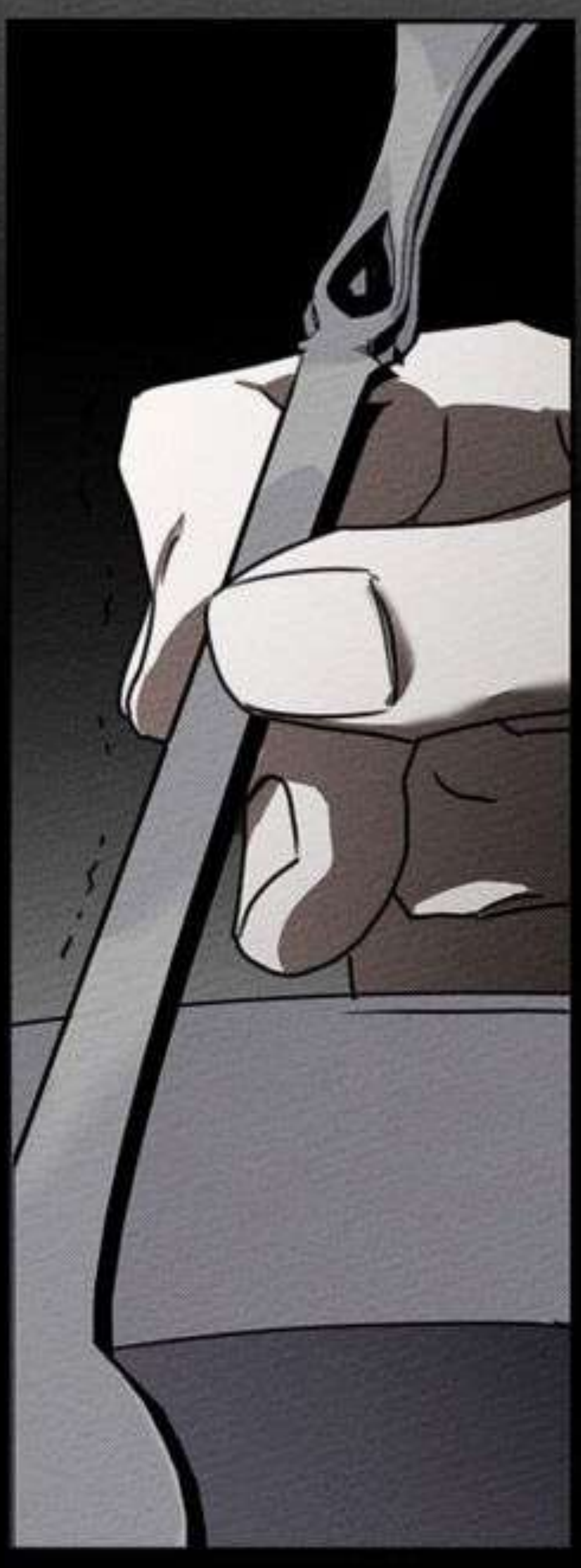

WHY'RE YOU BEING SO HUMBLE?
A WIN IS A WIN. EVERYONE KNOWS IT WAS A VALID VICTORY.

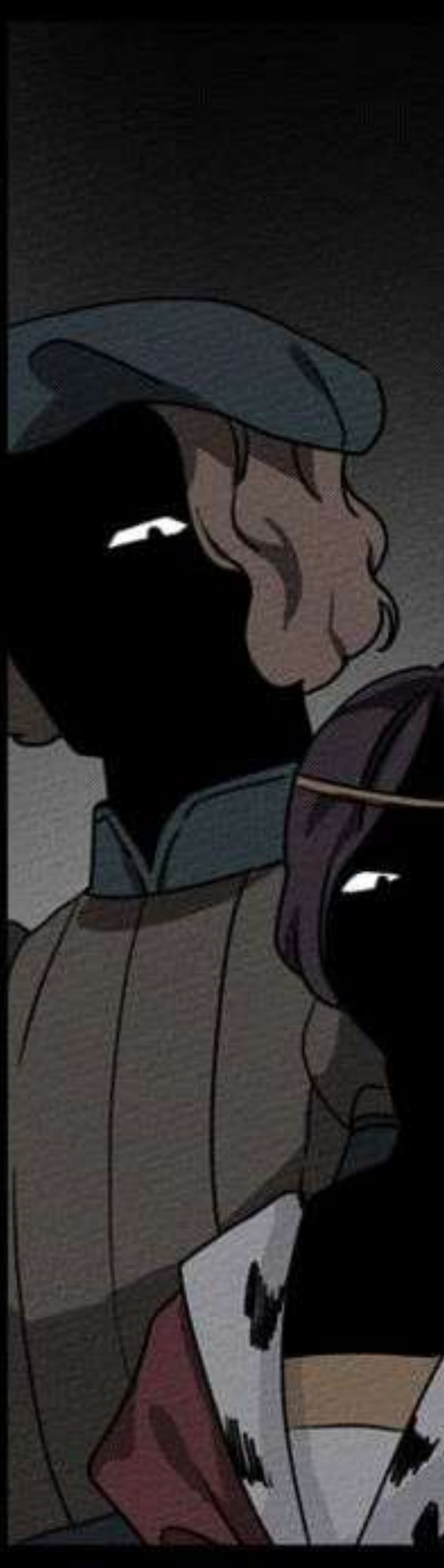
PLEASE TELL US

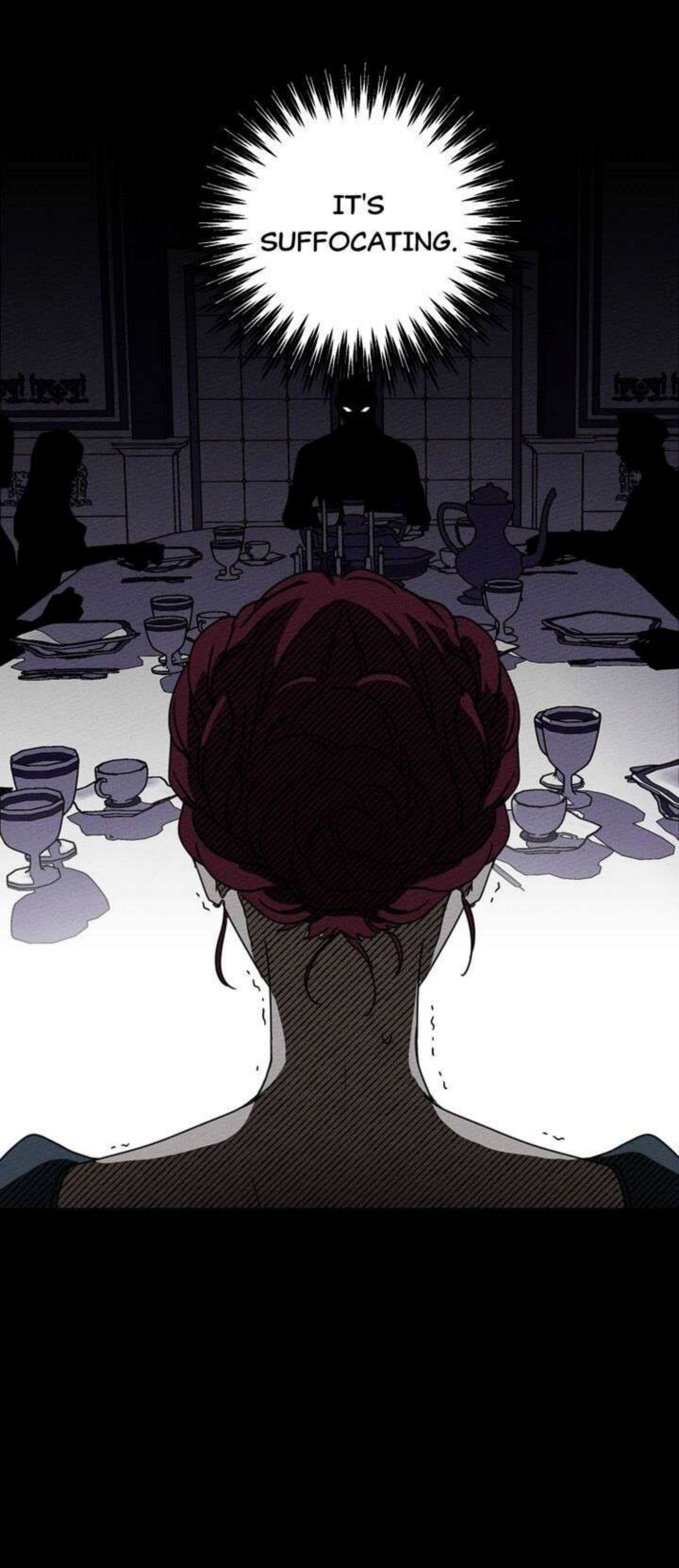

TELL US MORE ABOUT THE DUEL!
YOU'D RATHER HEAR ABOUT THAT INSTEAD OF THE CAMPAIGN?
NO! TELL US ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FIRST!
SO THERE WE WERE, SCOURING THE FOREST FOR THE DRAGON SEKTOR...
WHOAAA!


THEY INTERACT SO EASILY WITH EACH OTHER.
ARE THEY ALWAYS LIKE THIS?

THE BANQUETS I HAD BEEN
REQUIRED TO ATTEND

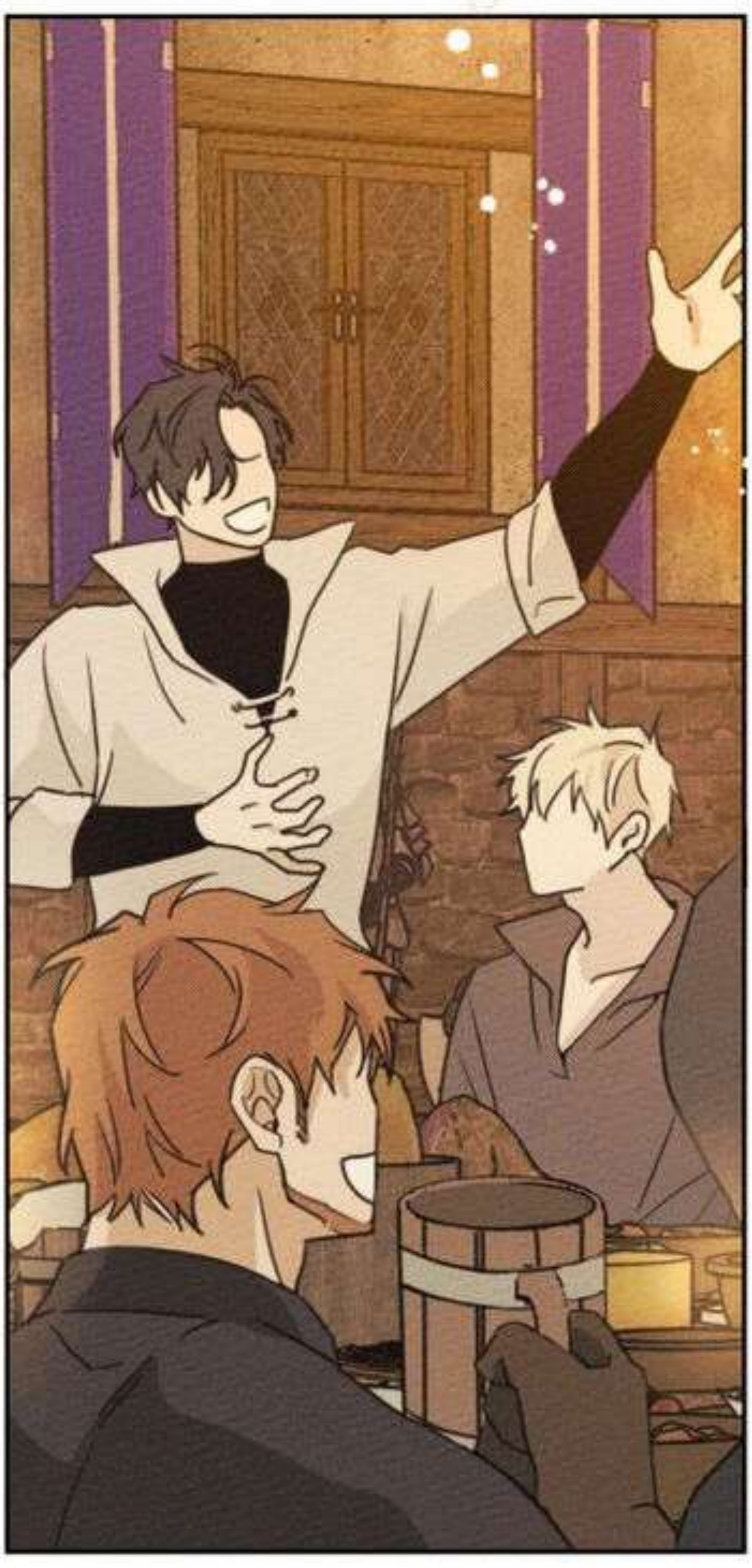


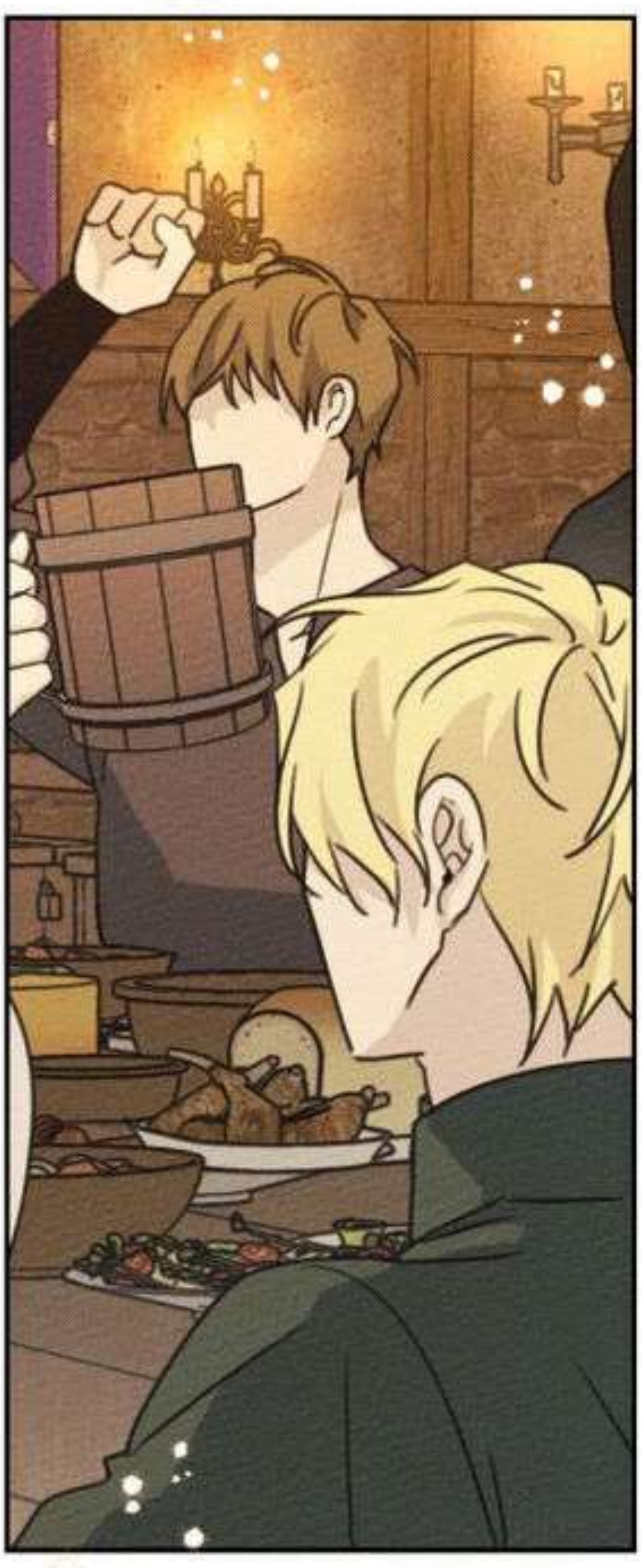



IT'S SUFFOCATING.

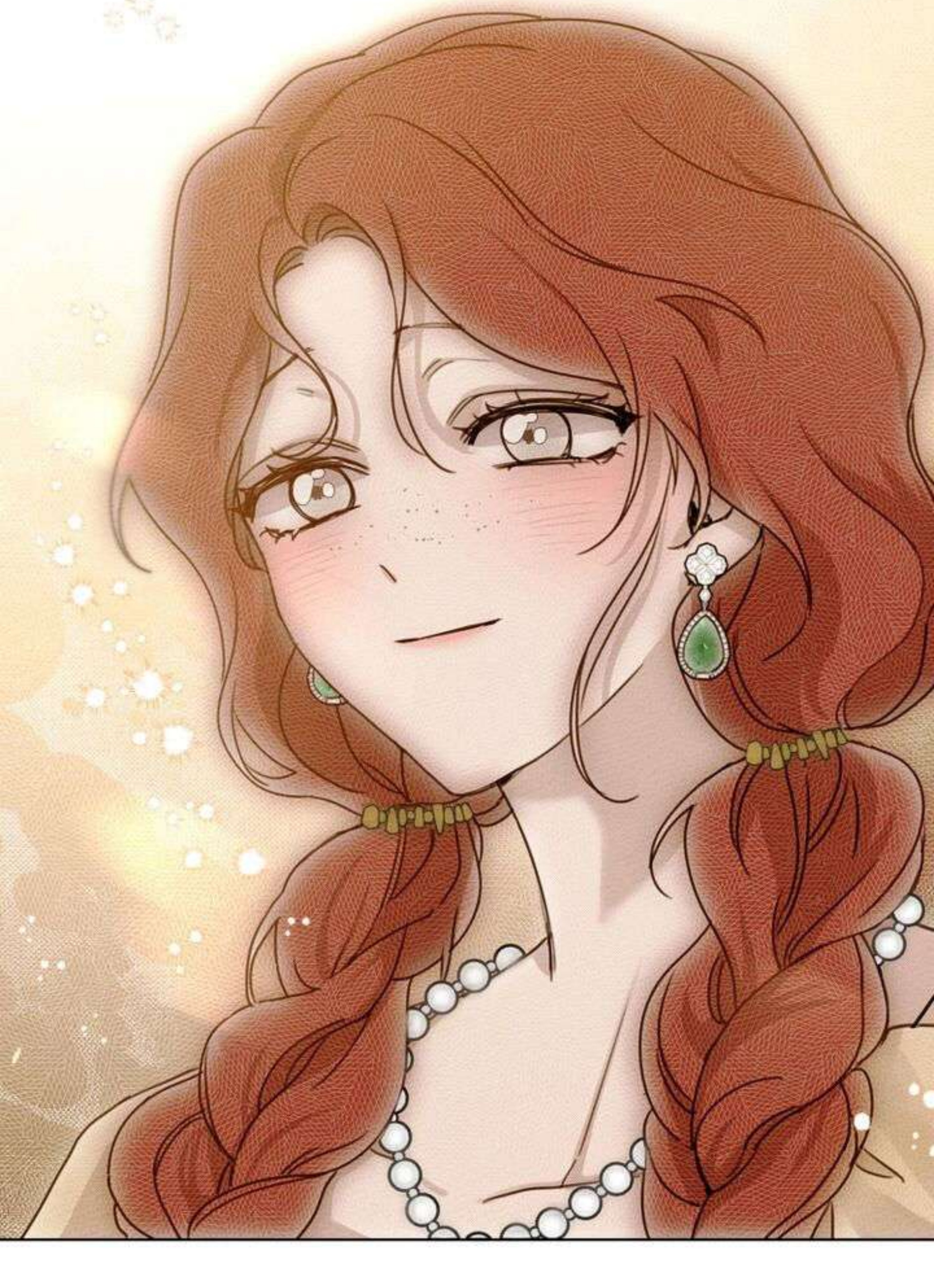
ALWAYS LEFT ME
WITH AN UPSET STOMACH.

IF MY FATHER SAW THIS,
HE'D BE REPULSED
AND CALL IT A DISGRACE.

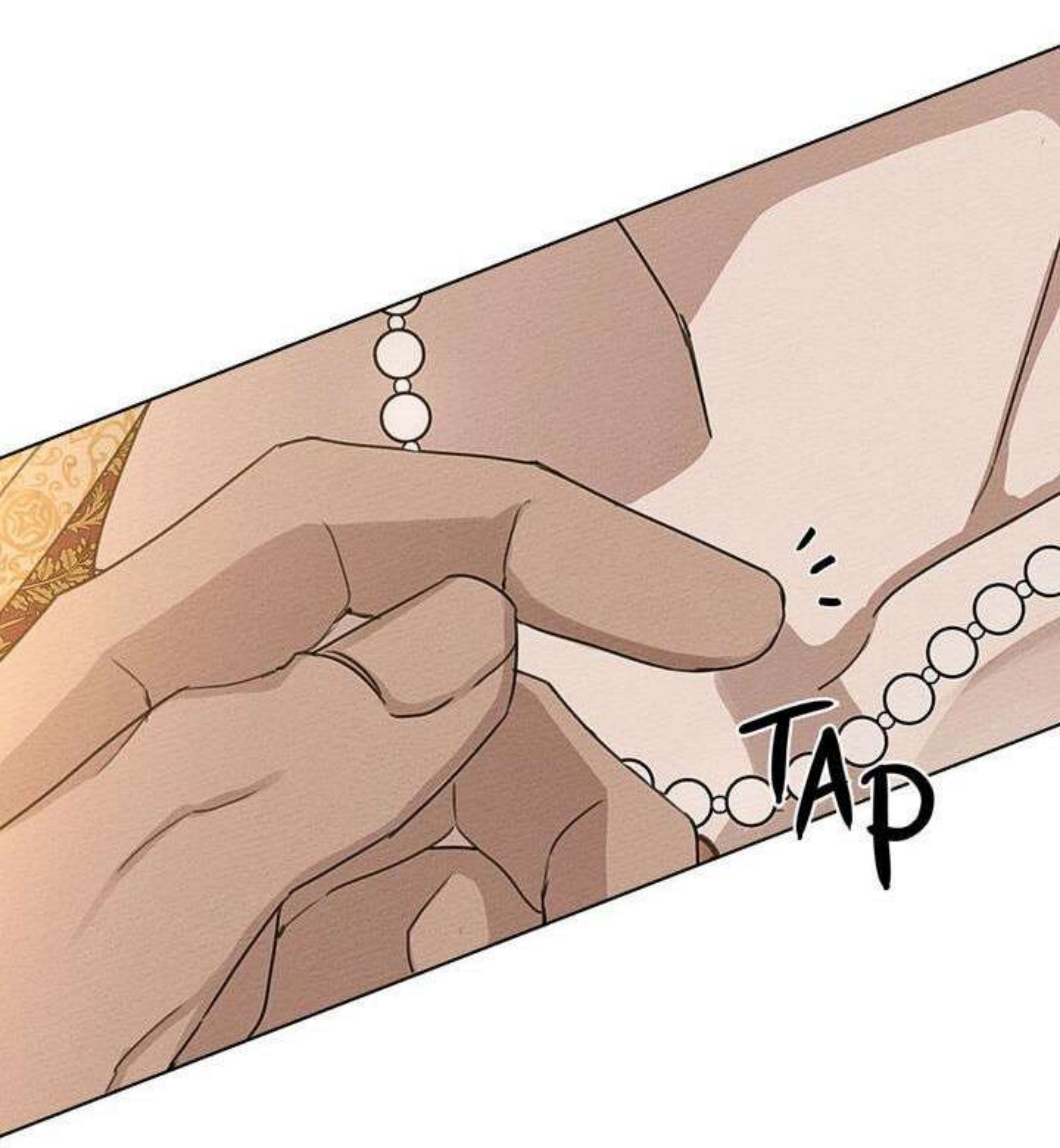


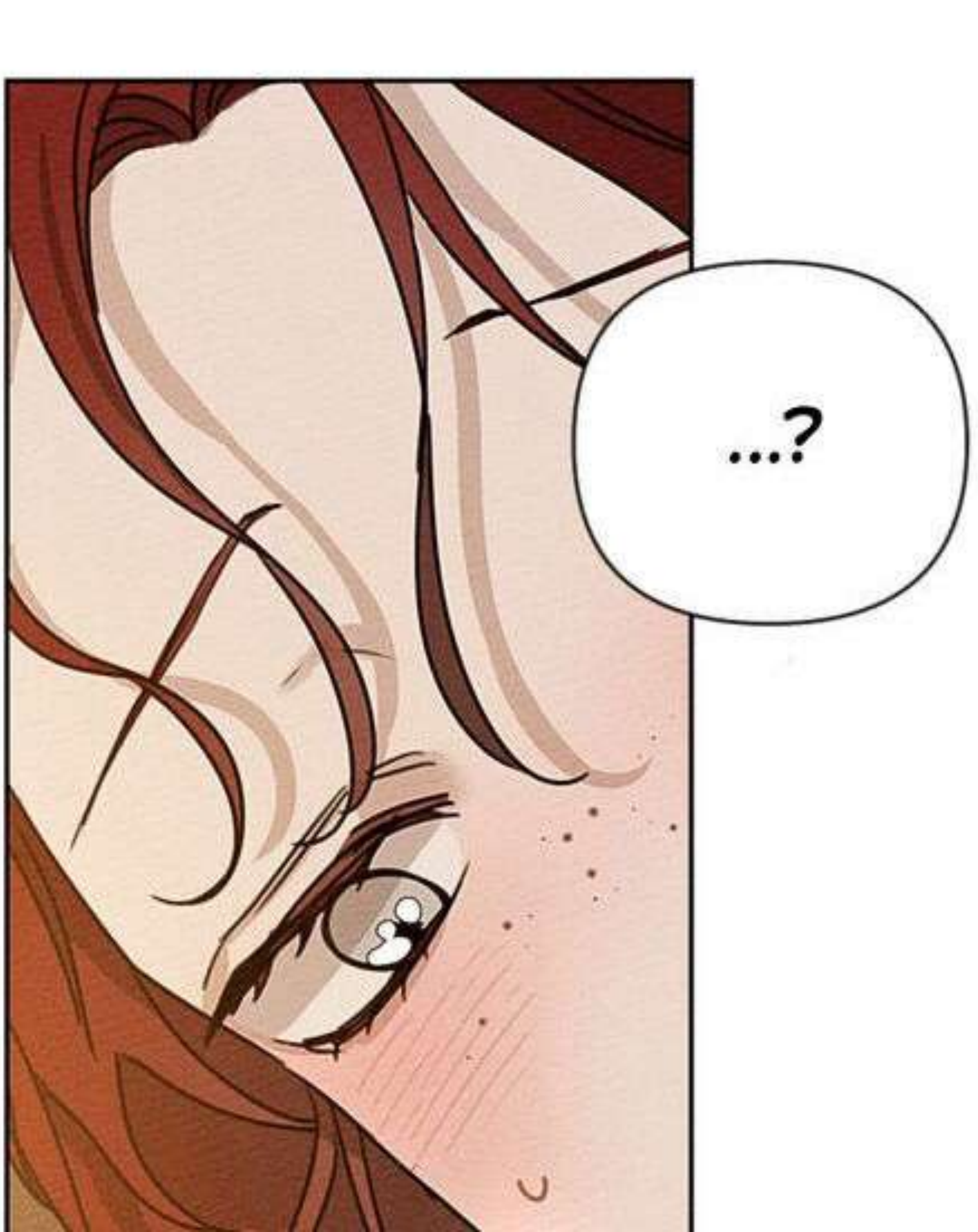


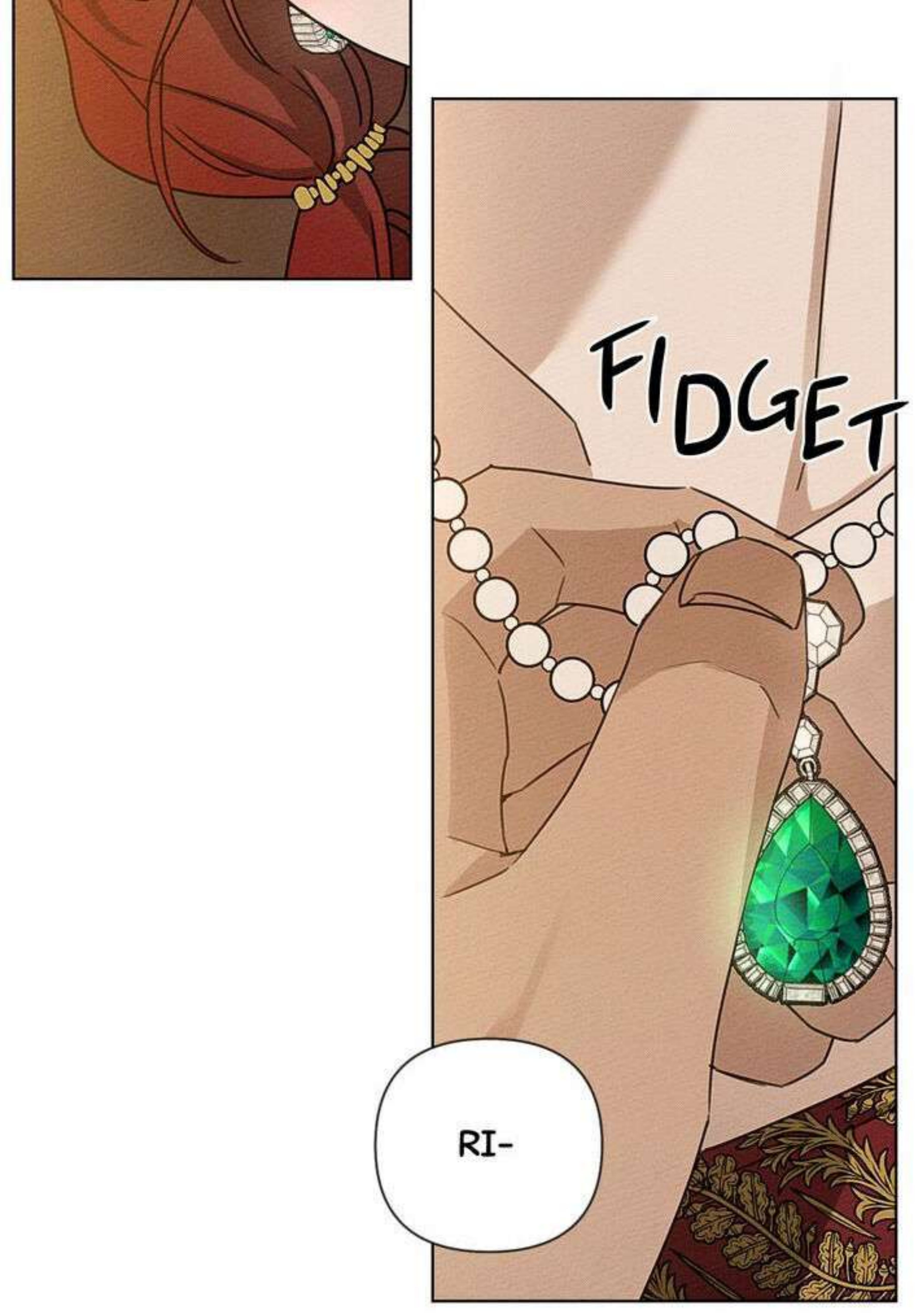
BUT IT FEELS
SO ALIVE.



I THINK I'M STARTING
TO ENJOY MYSELF, TOO.


TAP


...?


FIDGET
RI-

RIFTAN...?

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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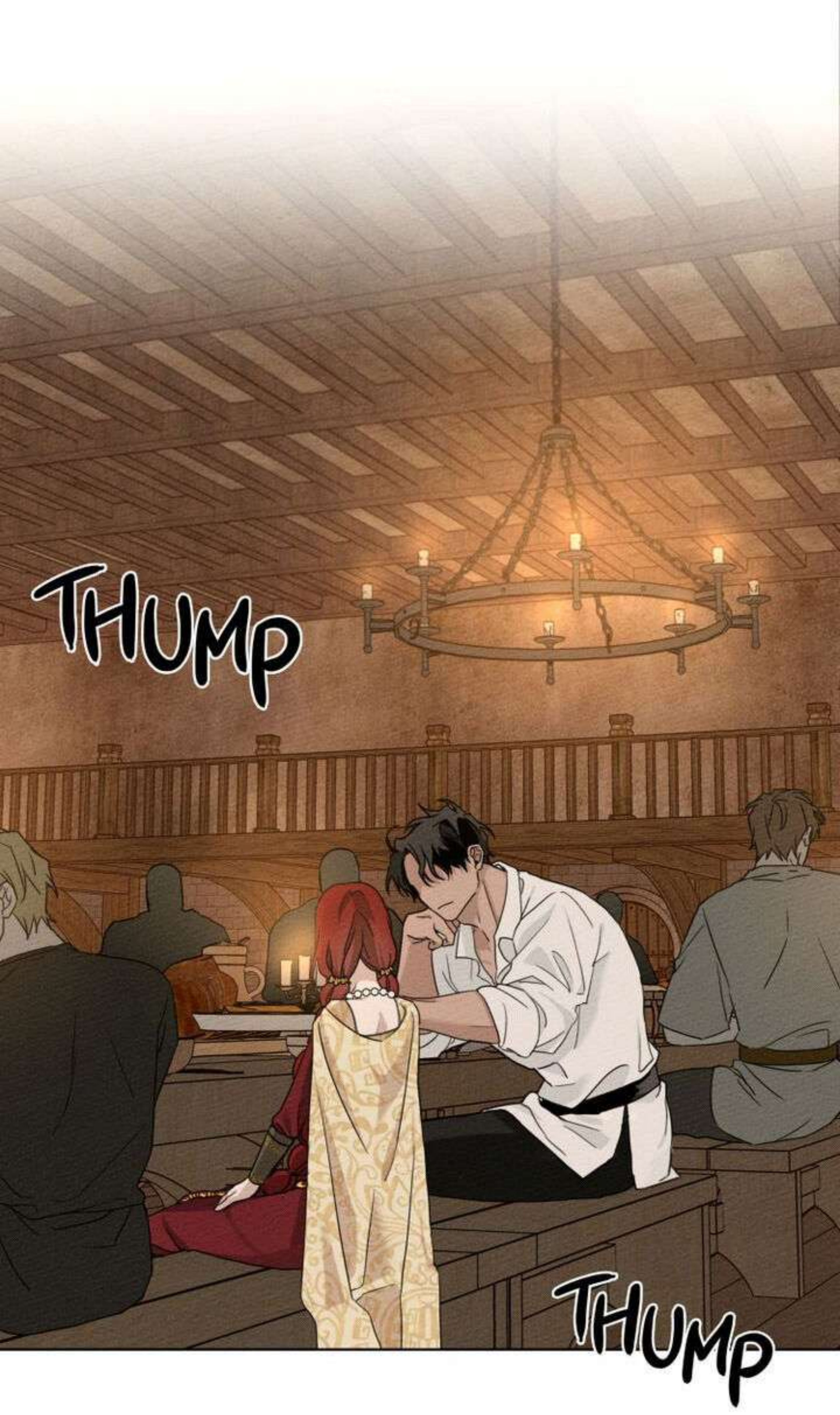
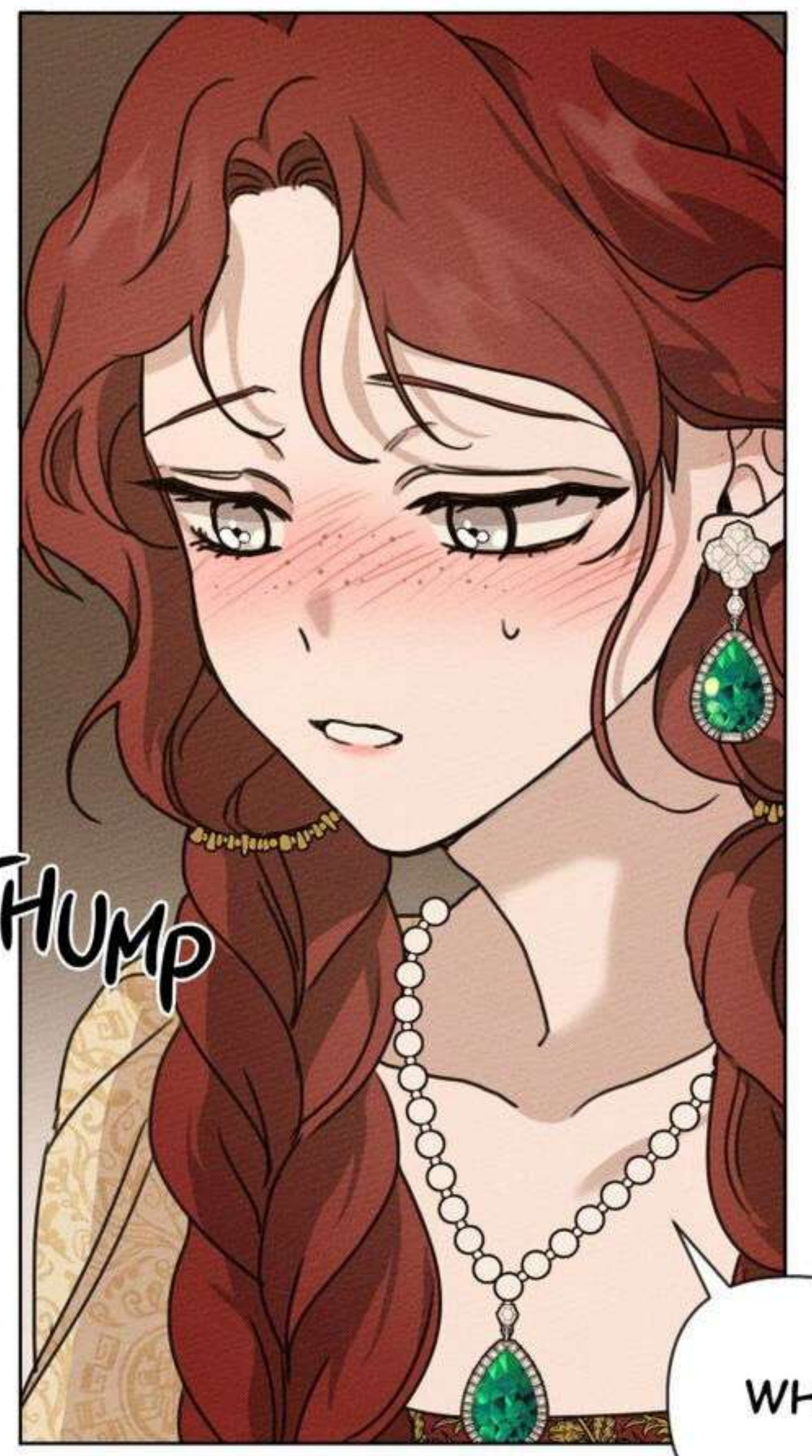
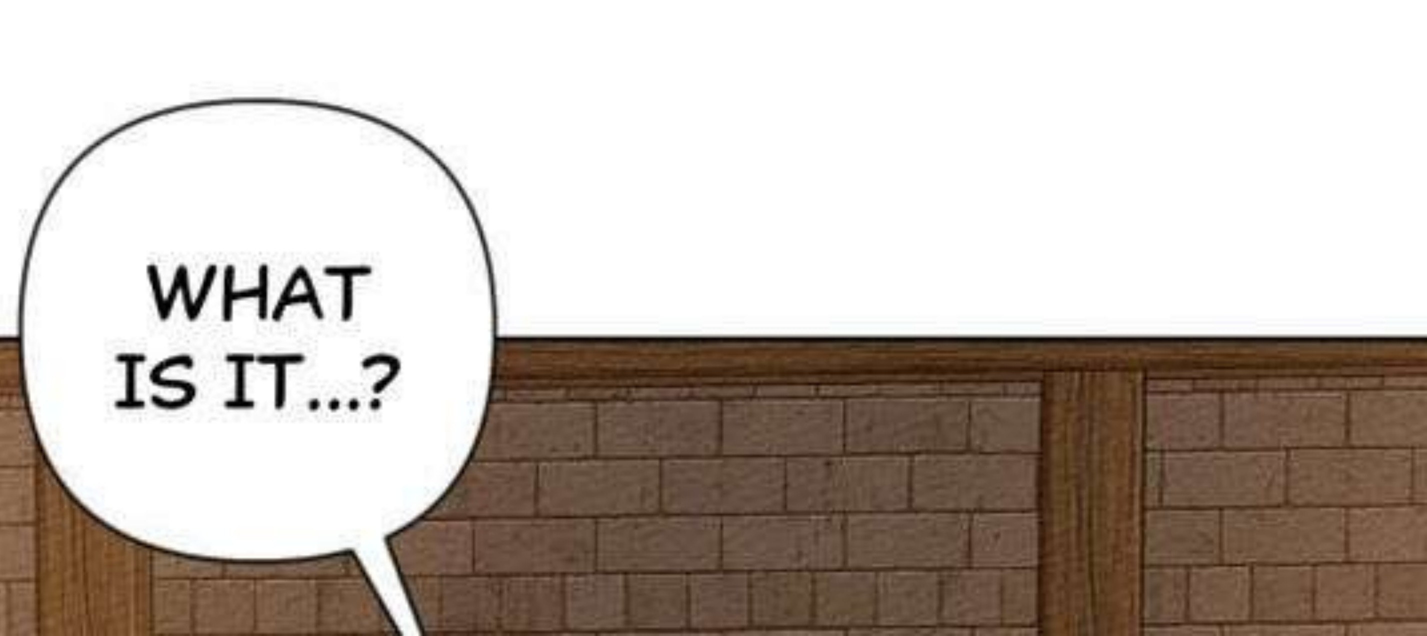
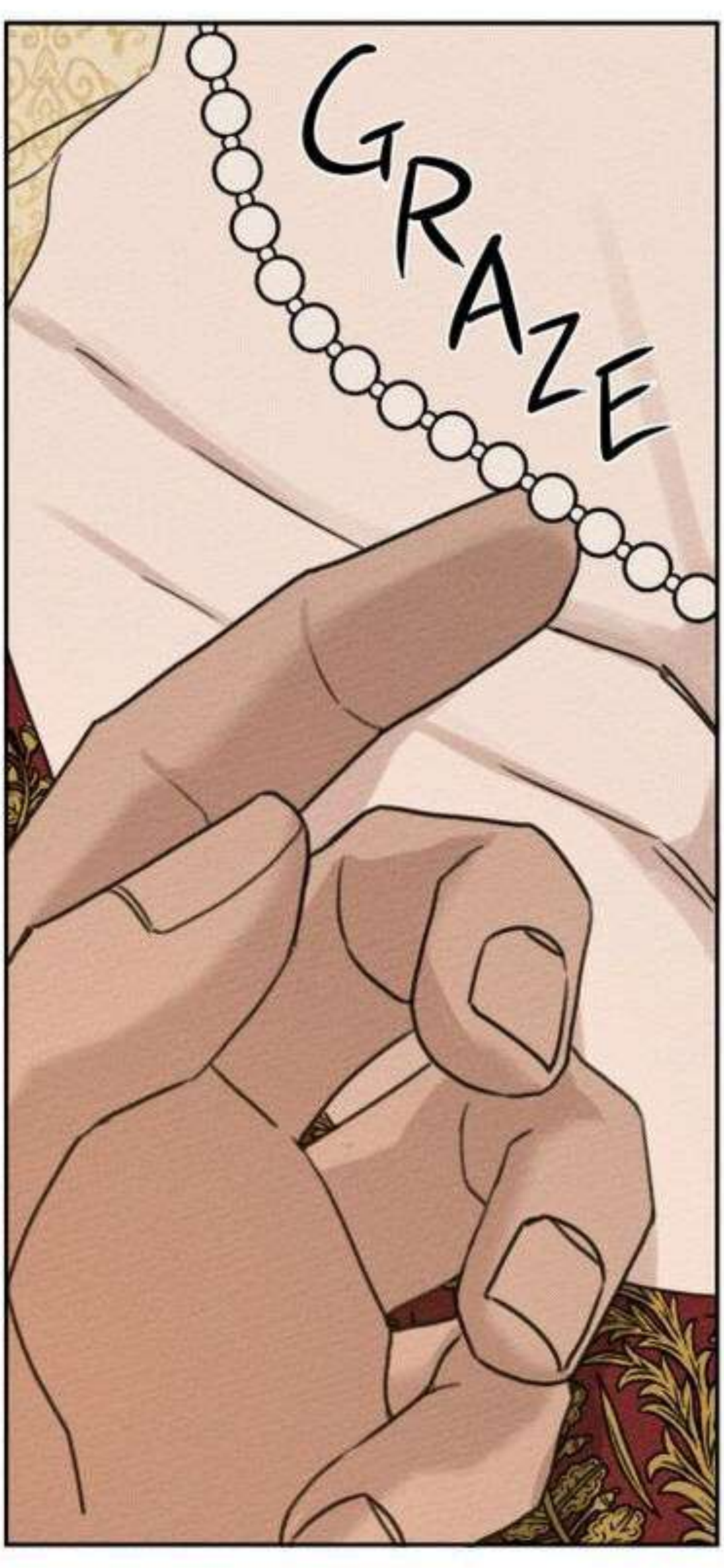
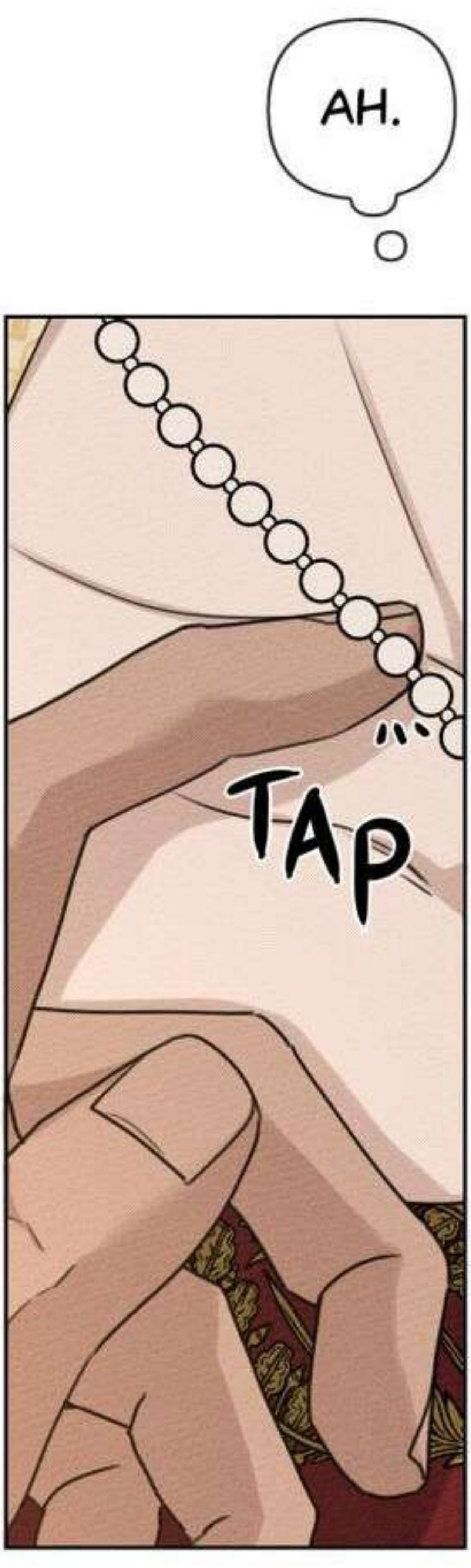
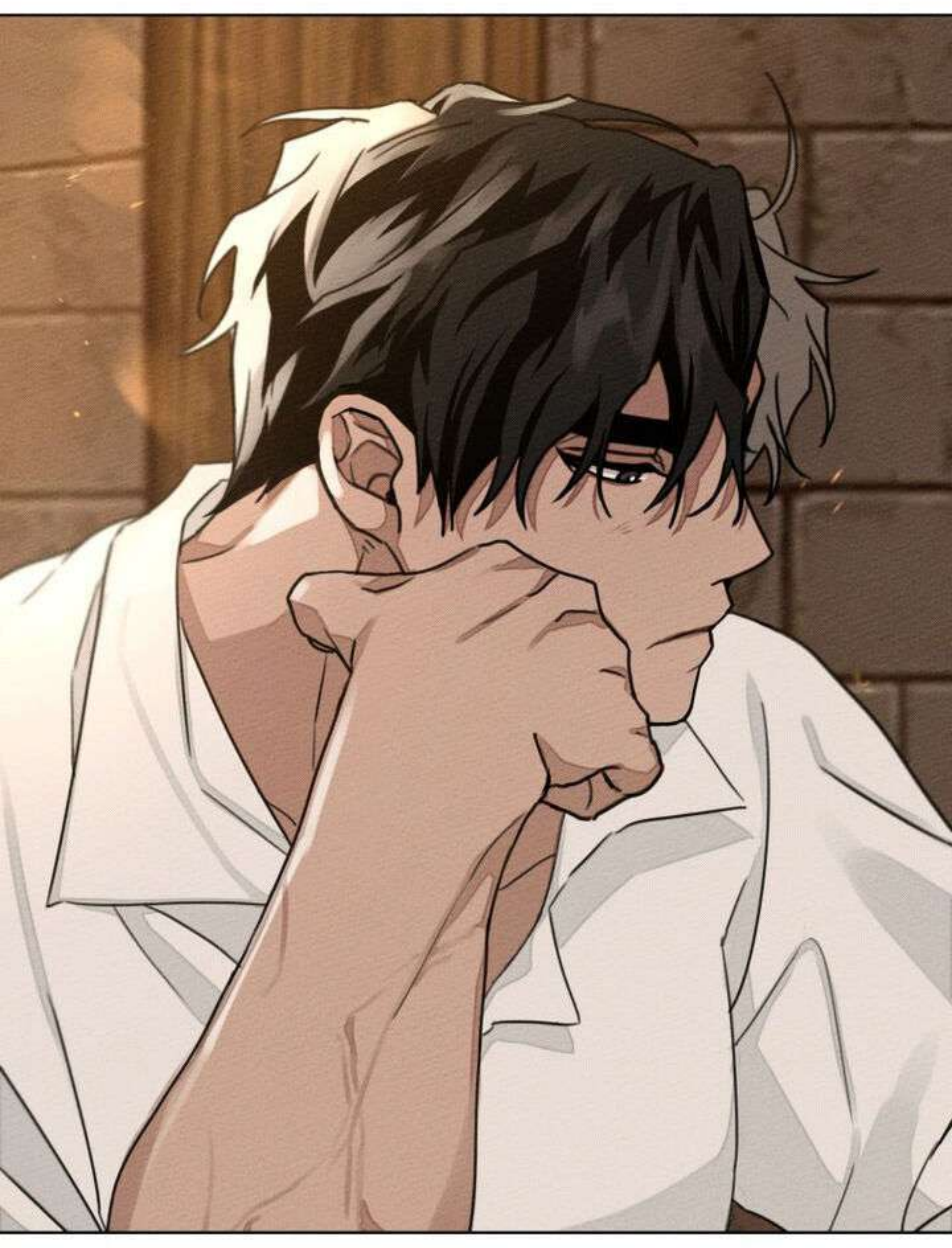

THUMP
THUMP

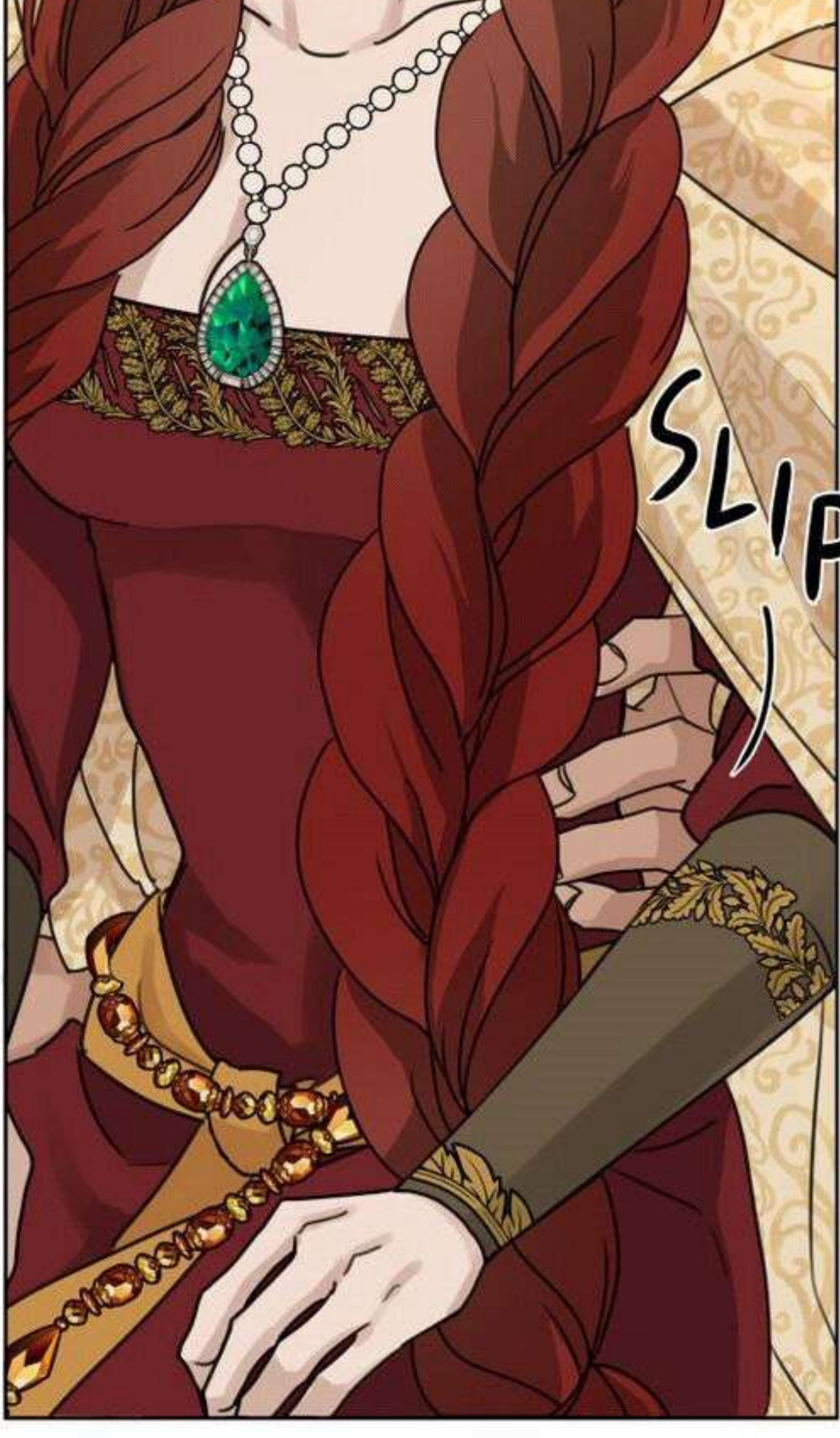

THUMP
WH-

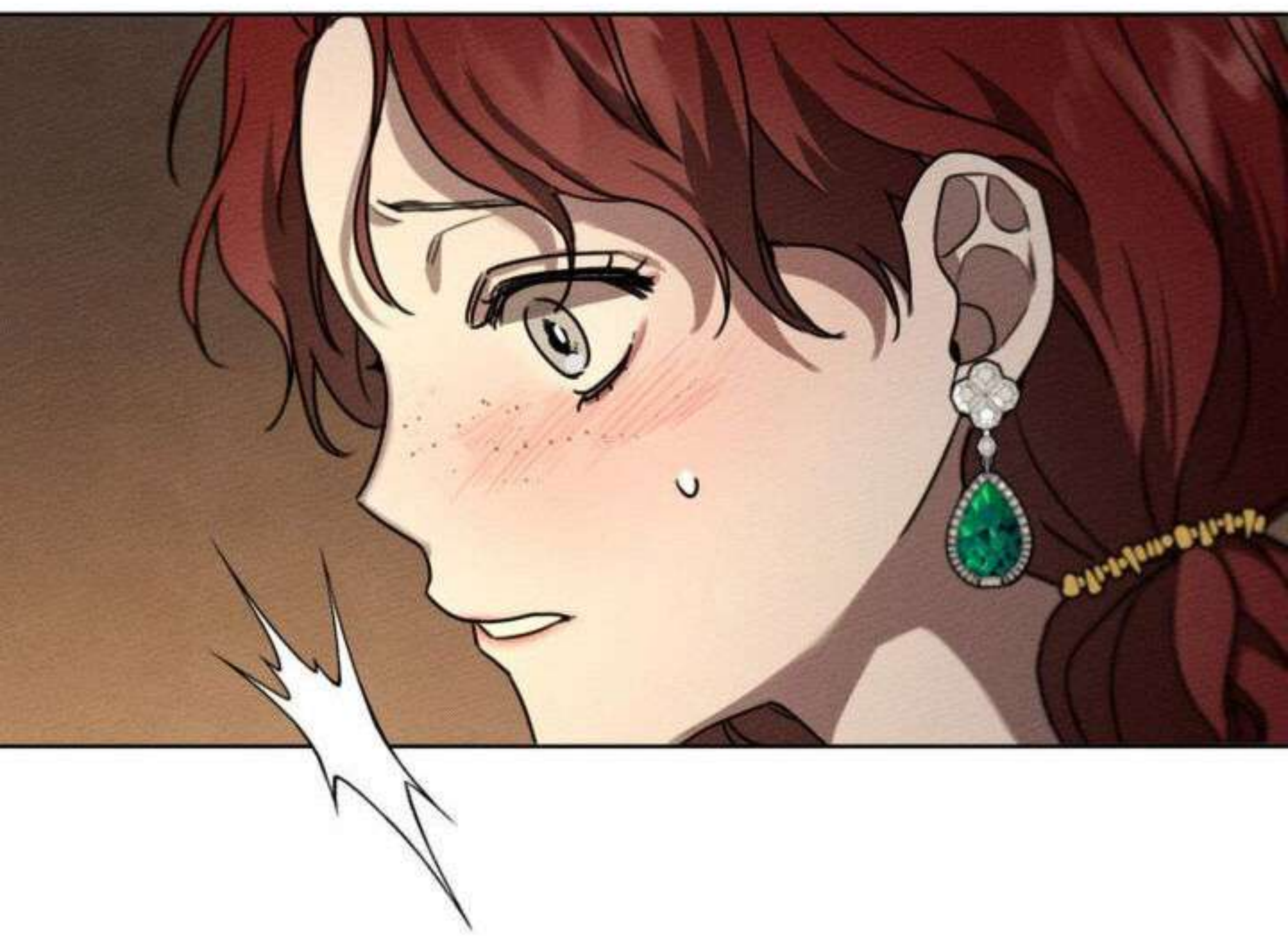

WHAT IS IT...?

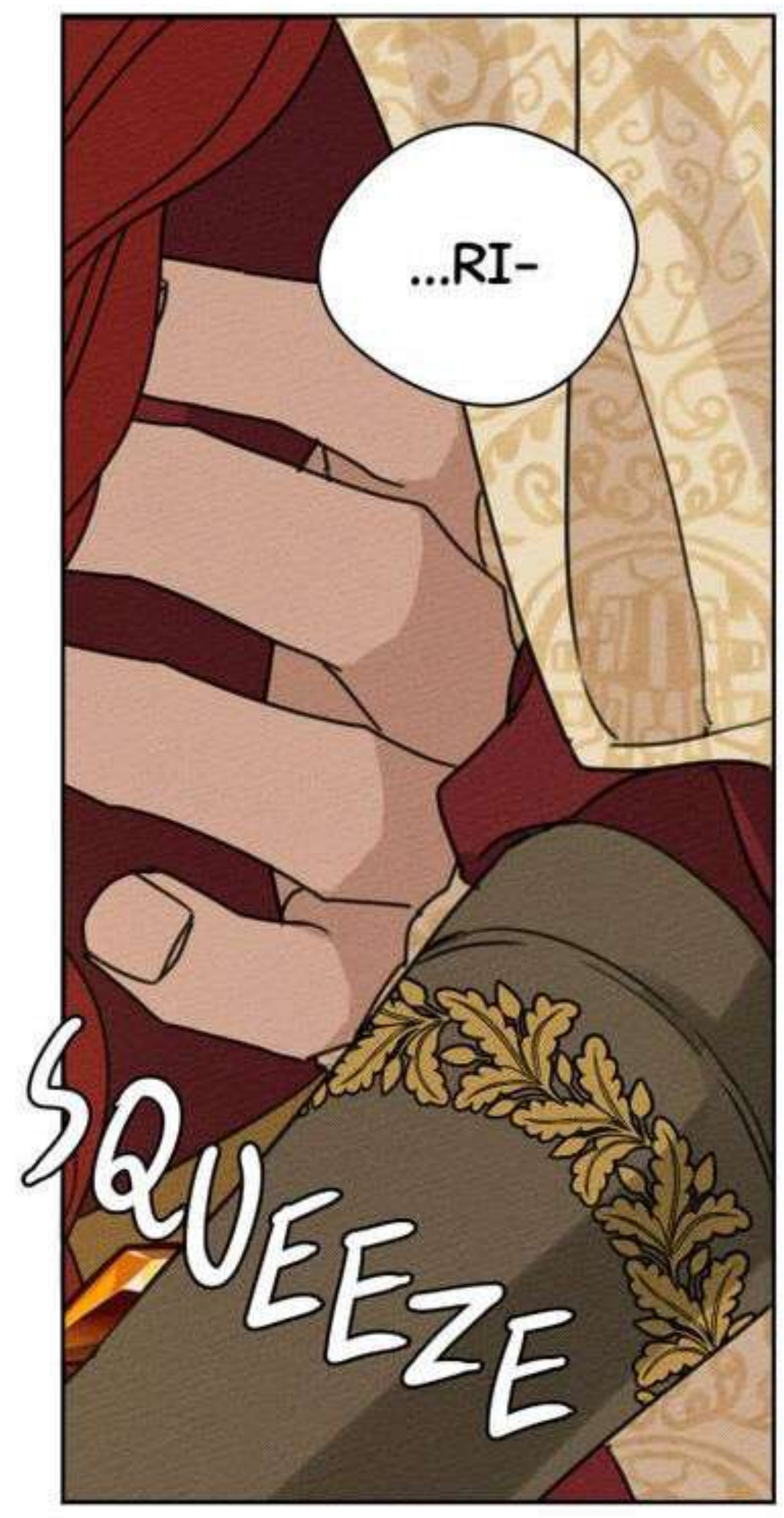

GRAZE

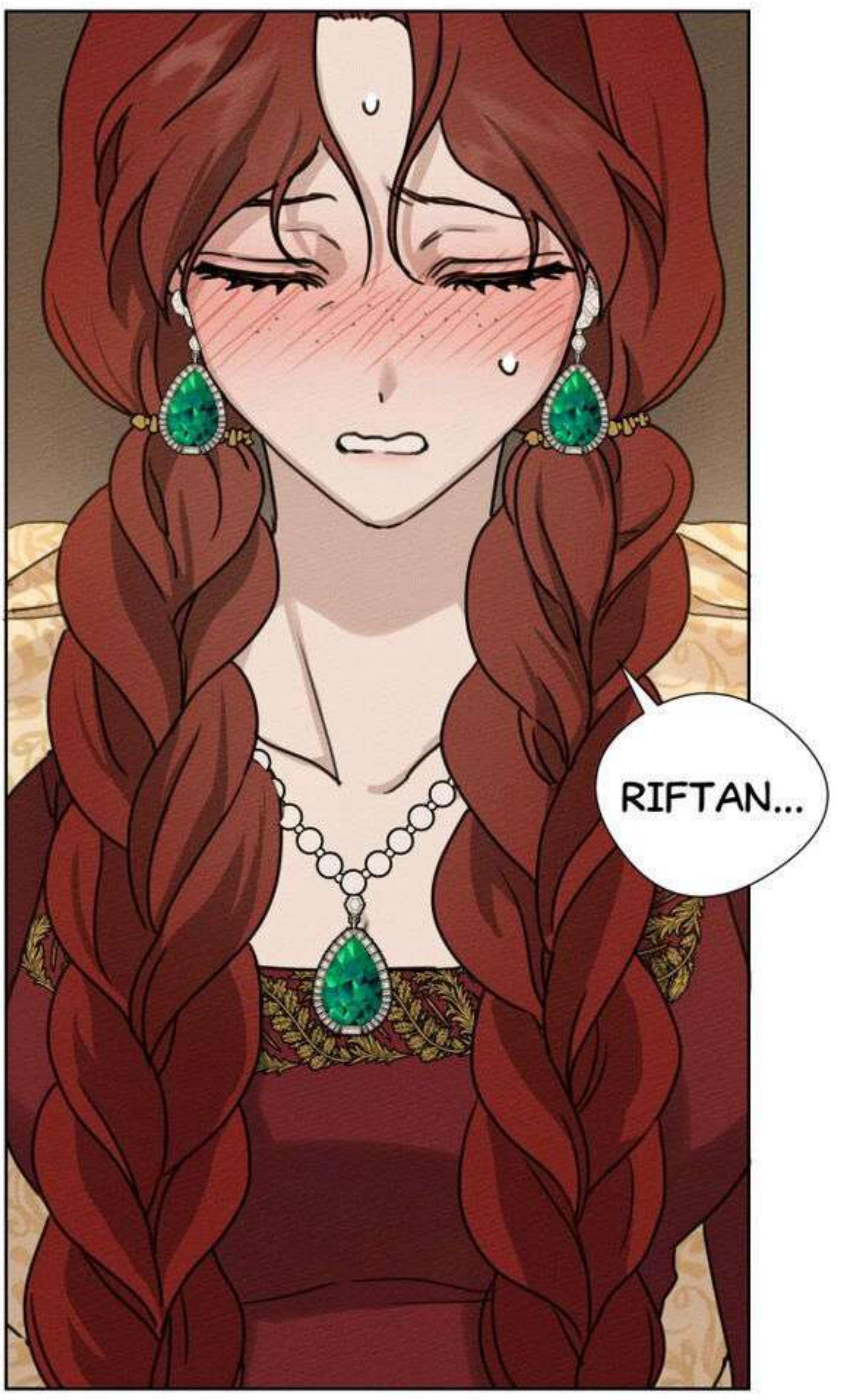

AH.
TAP

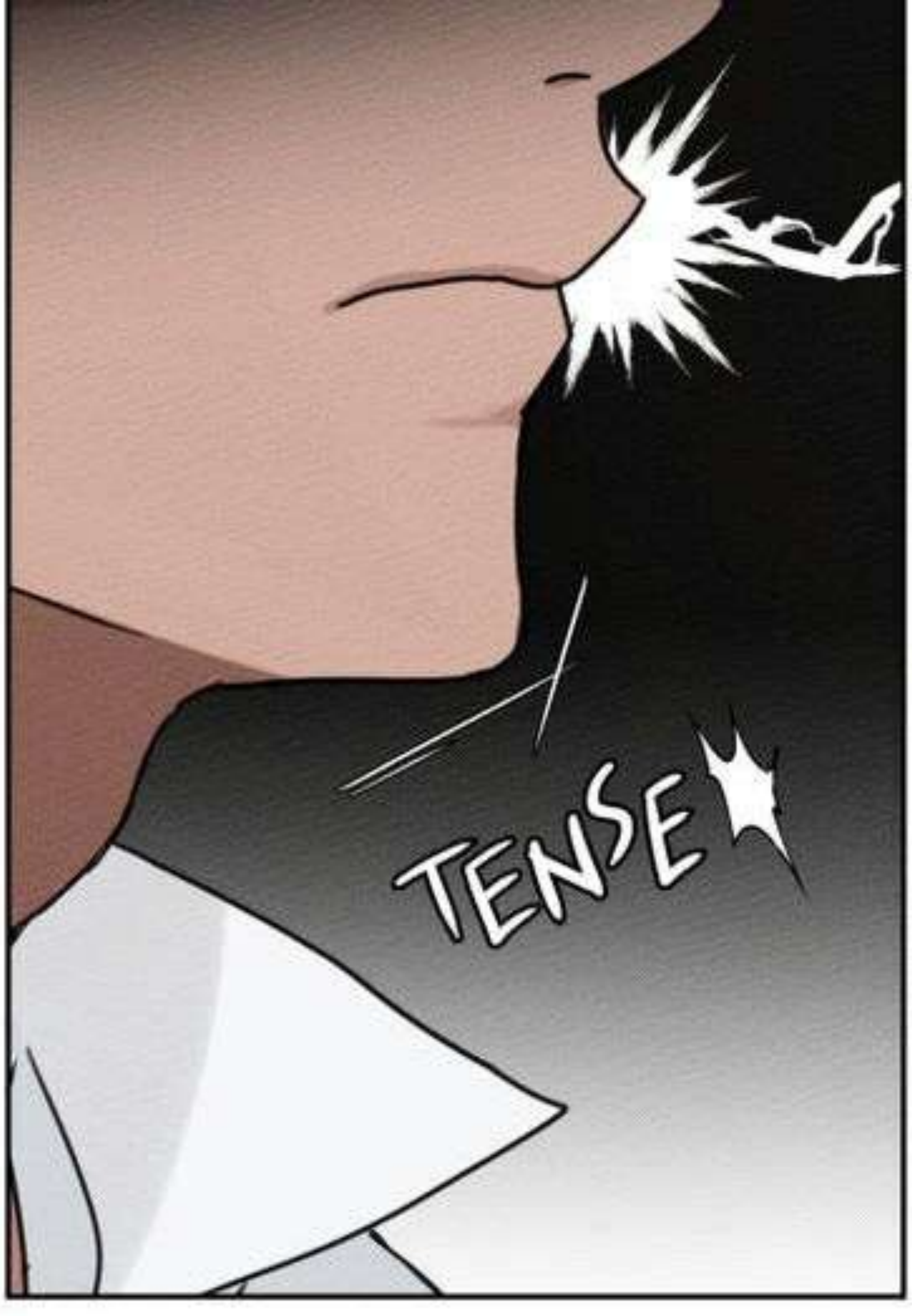


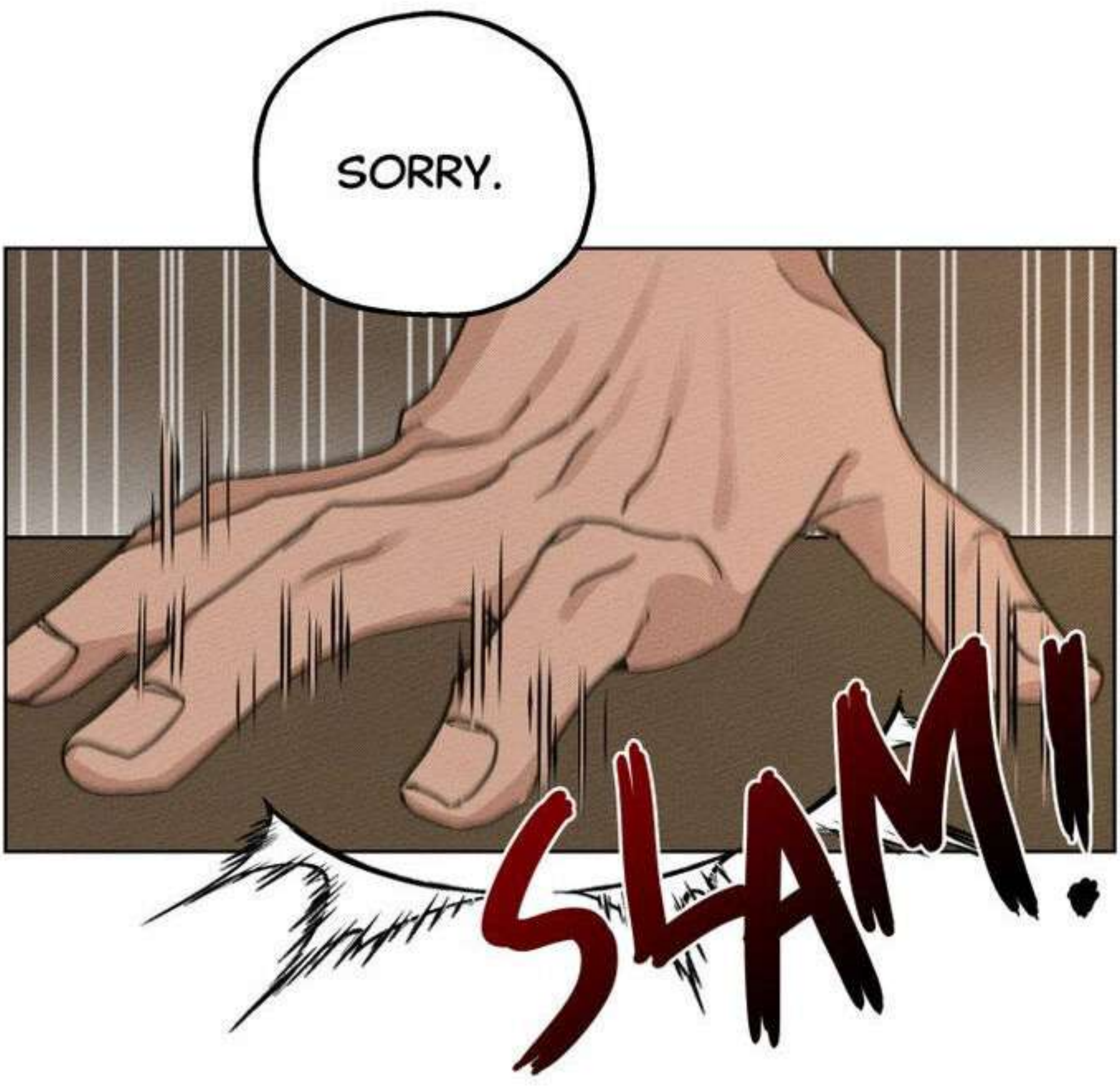

SLIP

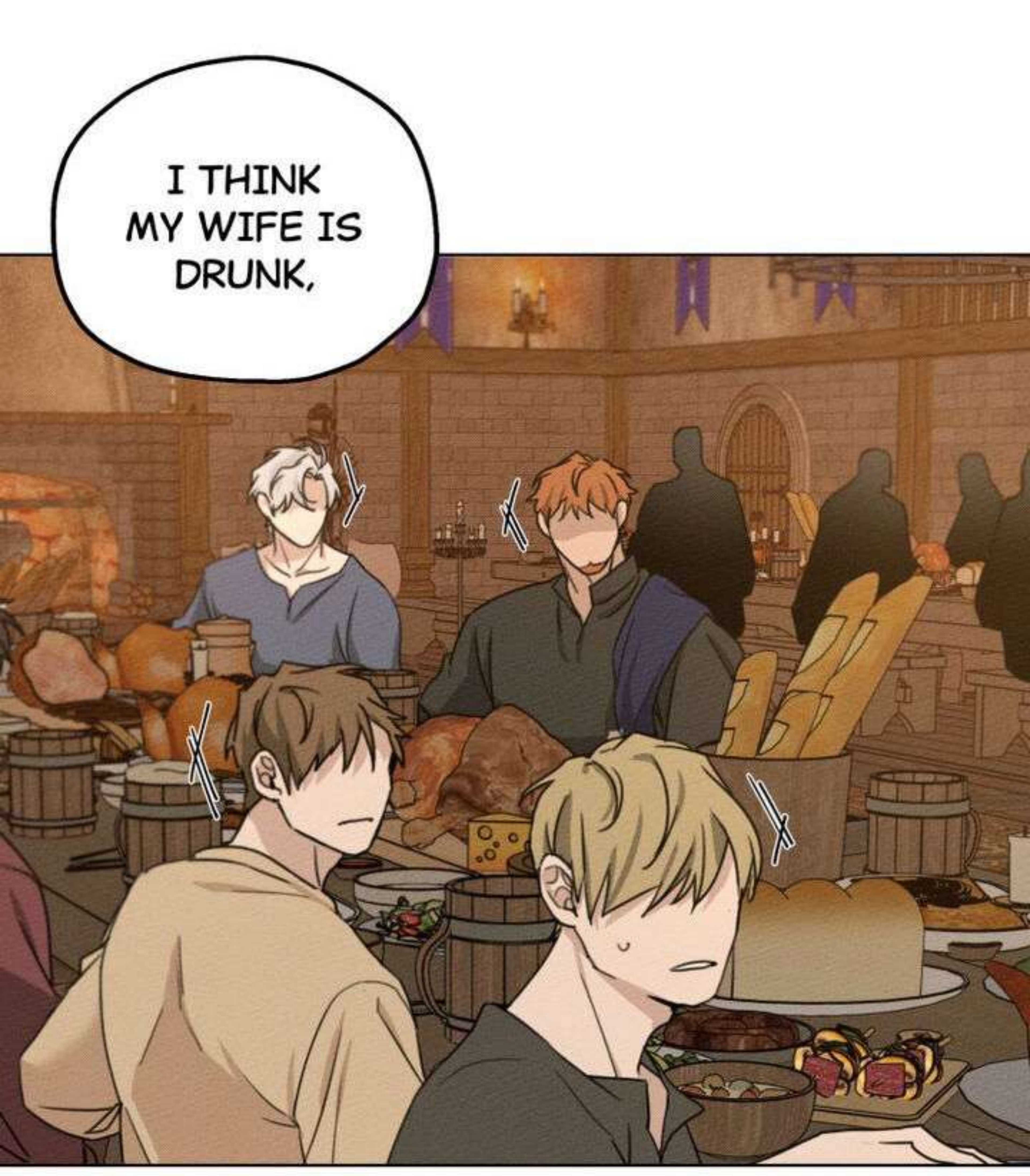


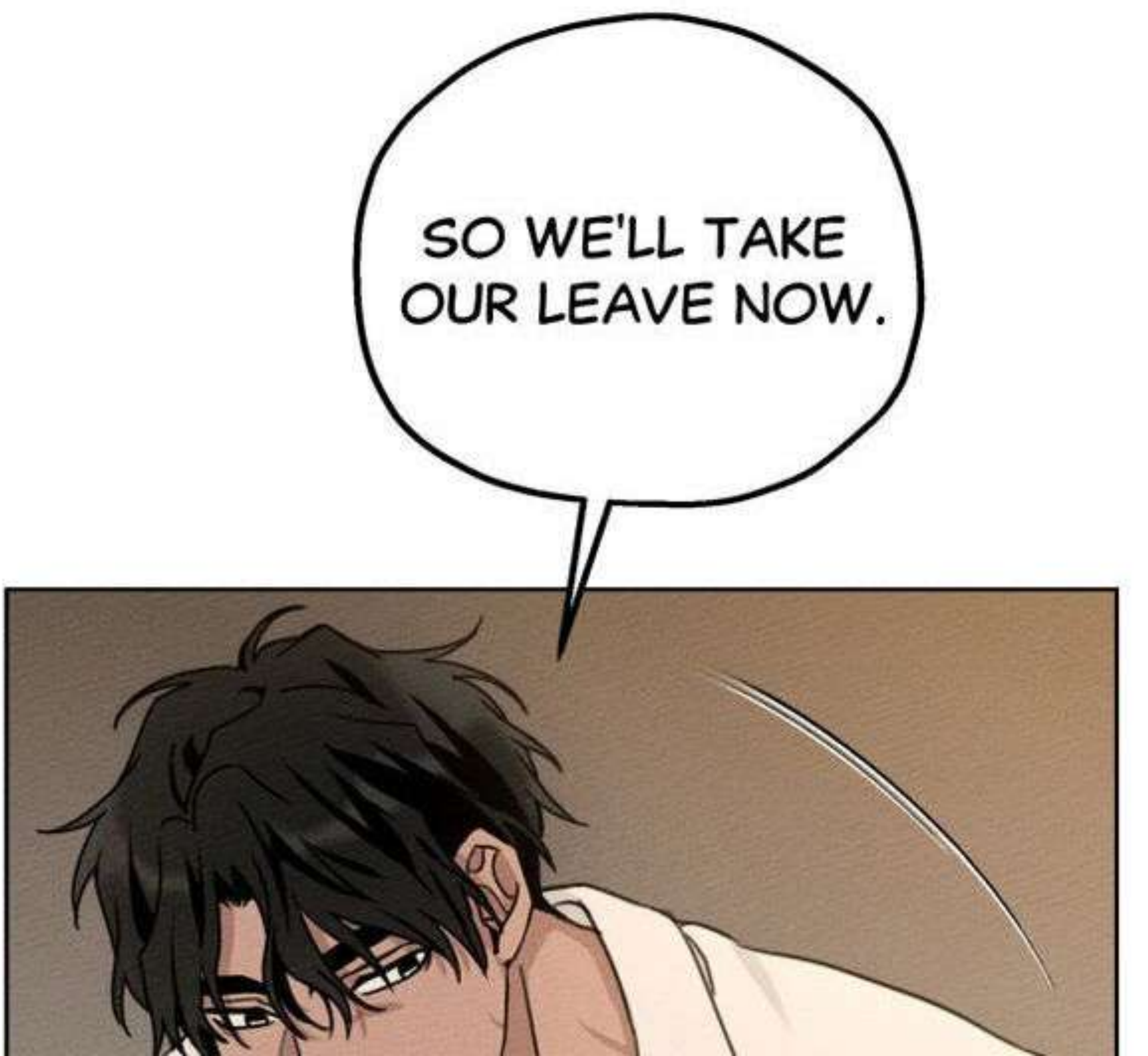

...RI-
SQUEEZE

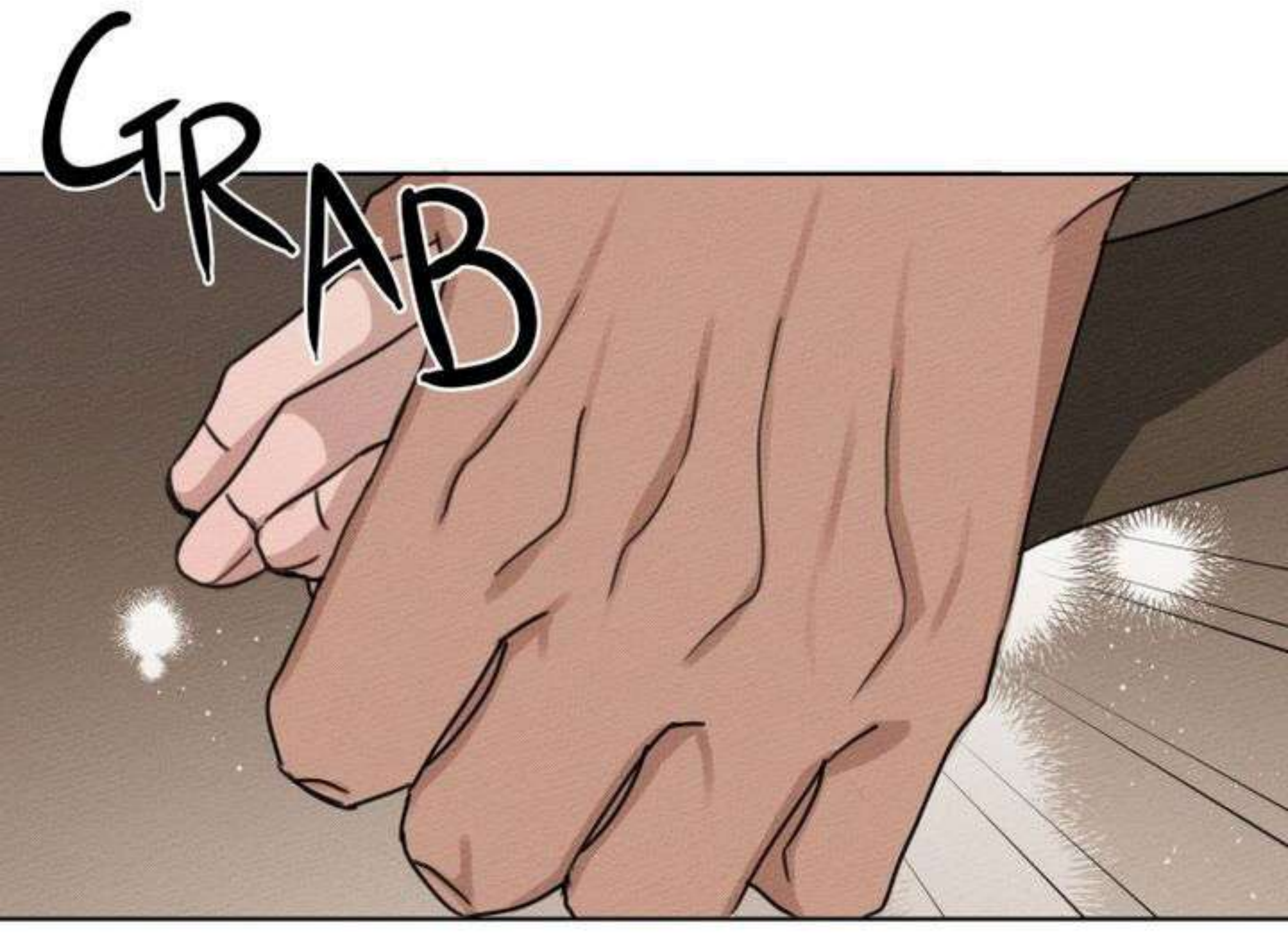

RIFTAN...

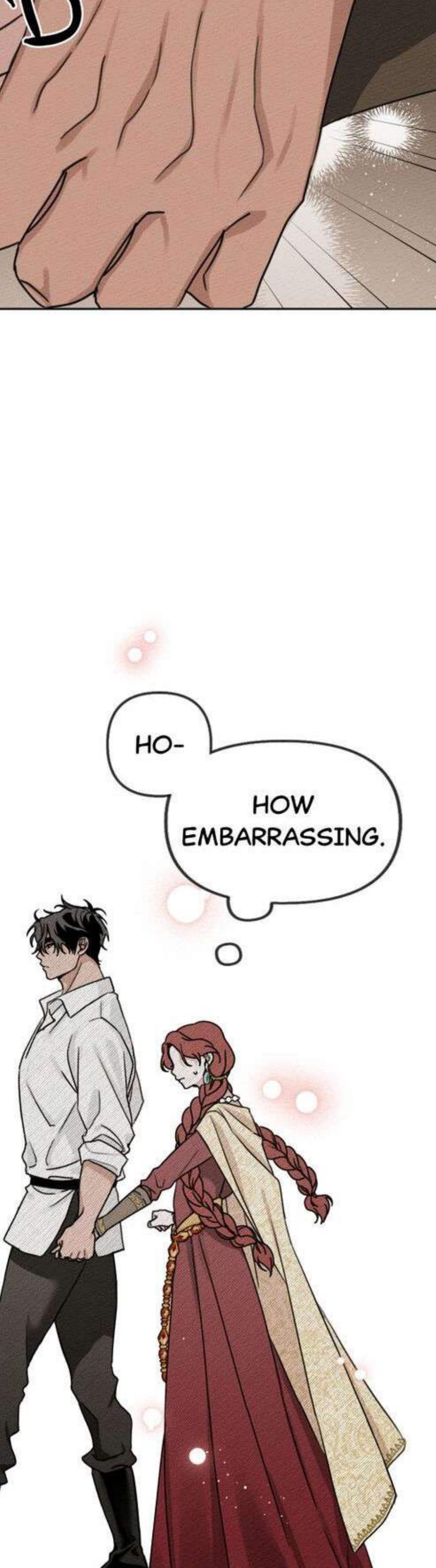

TENSE

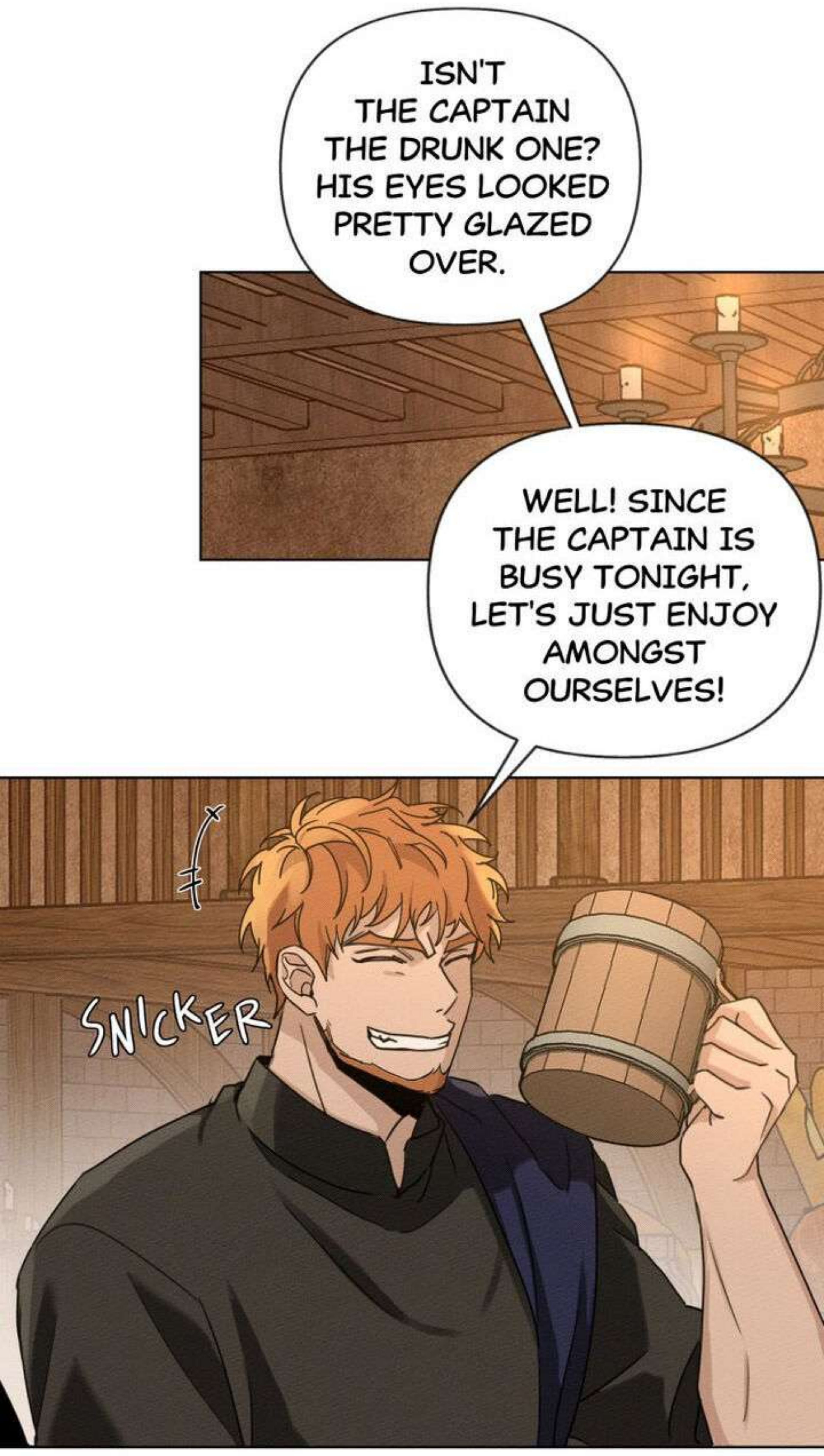

SORRY.
SLAM!

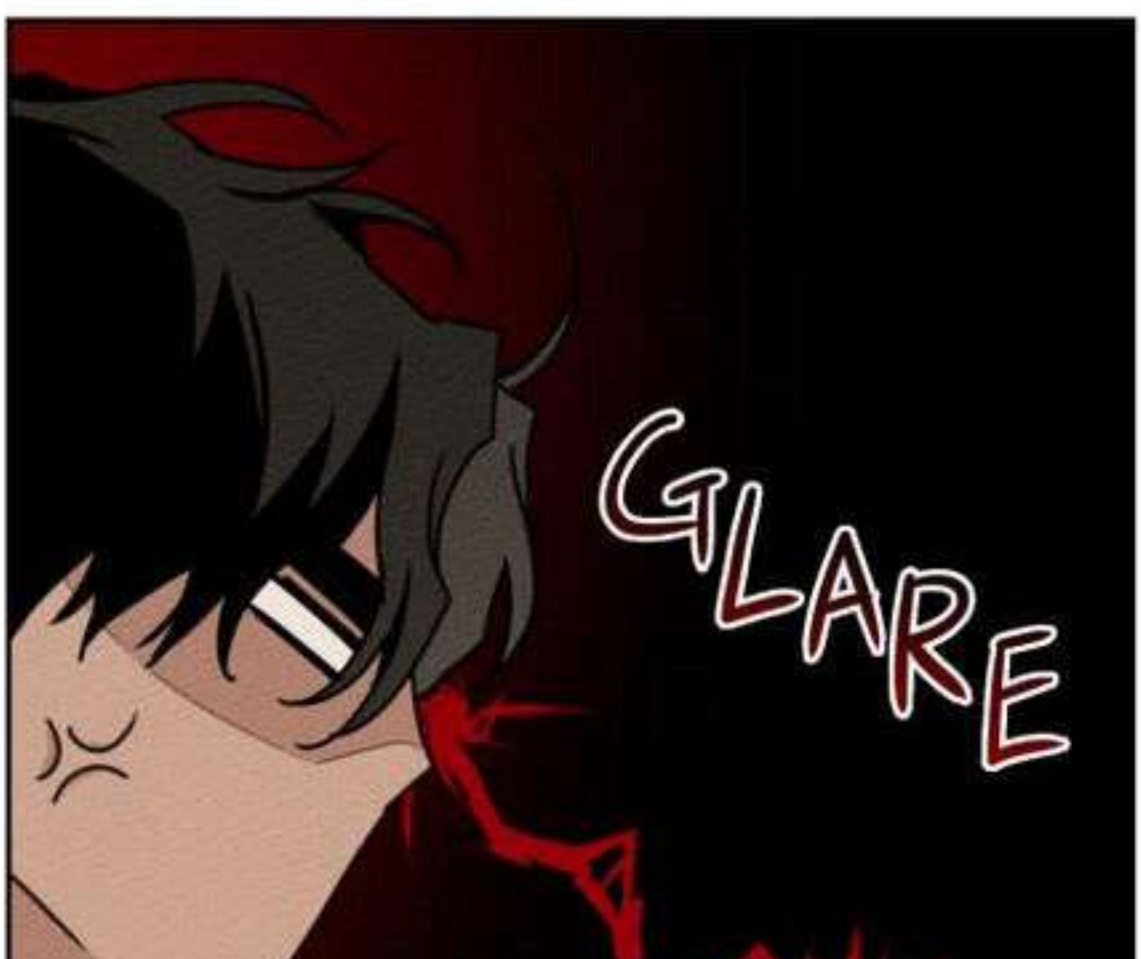

I THINK MY WIFE IS DRUNK,

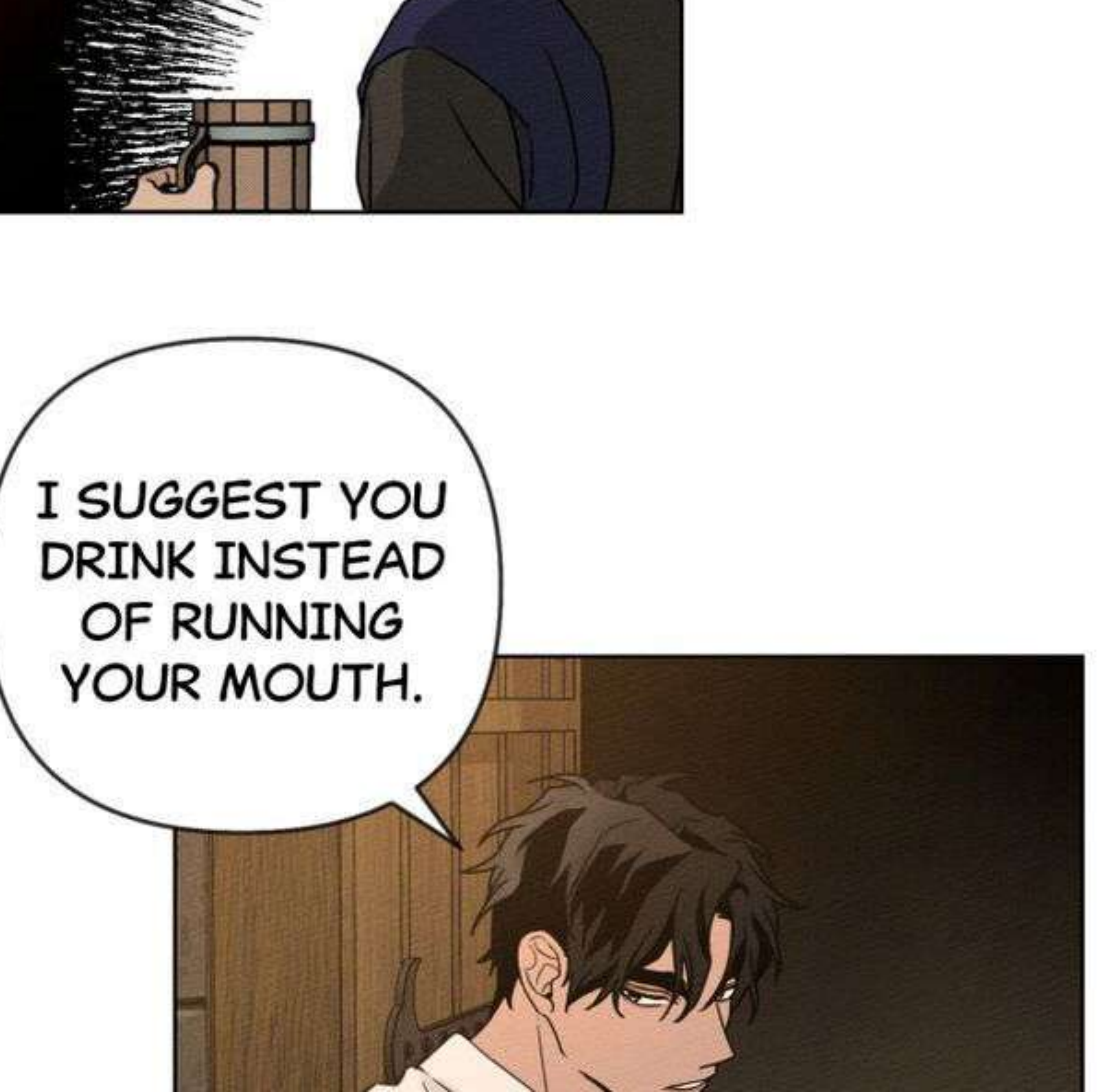

SO WE'LL TAKE OUR LEAVE NOW.

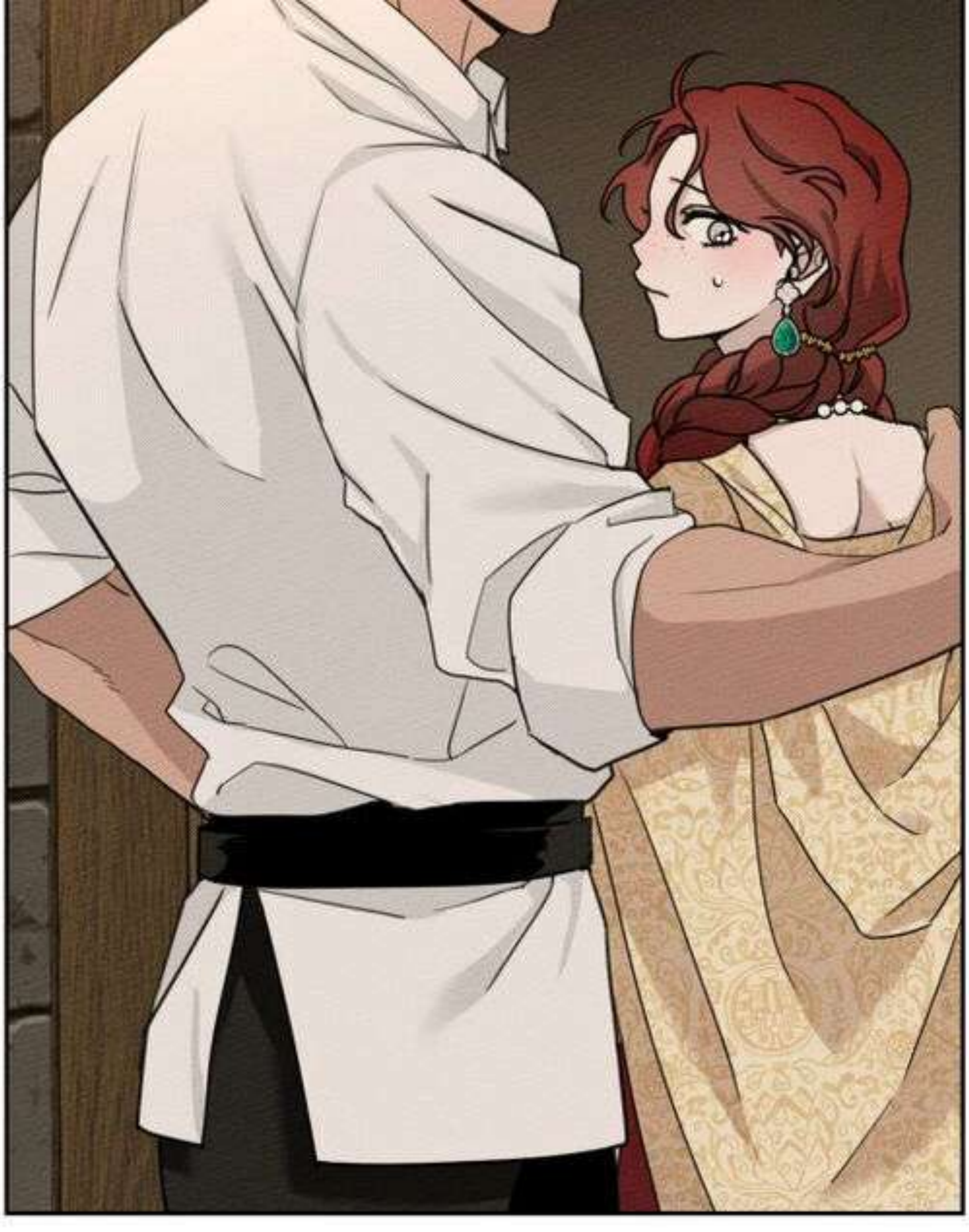

GRAB

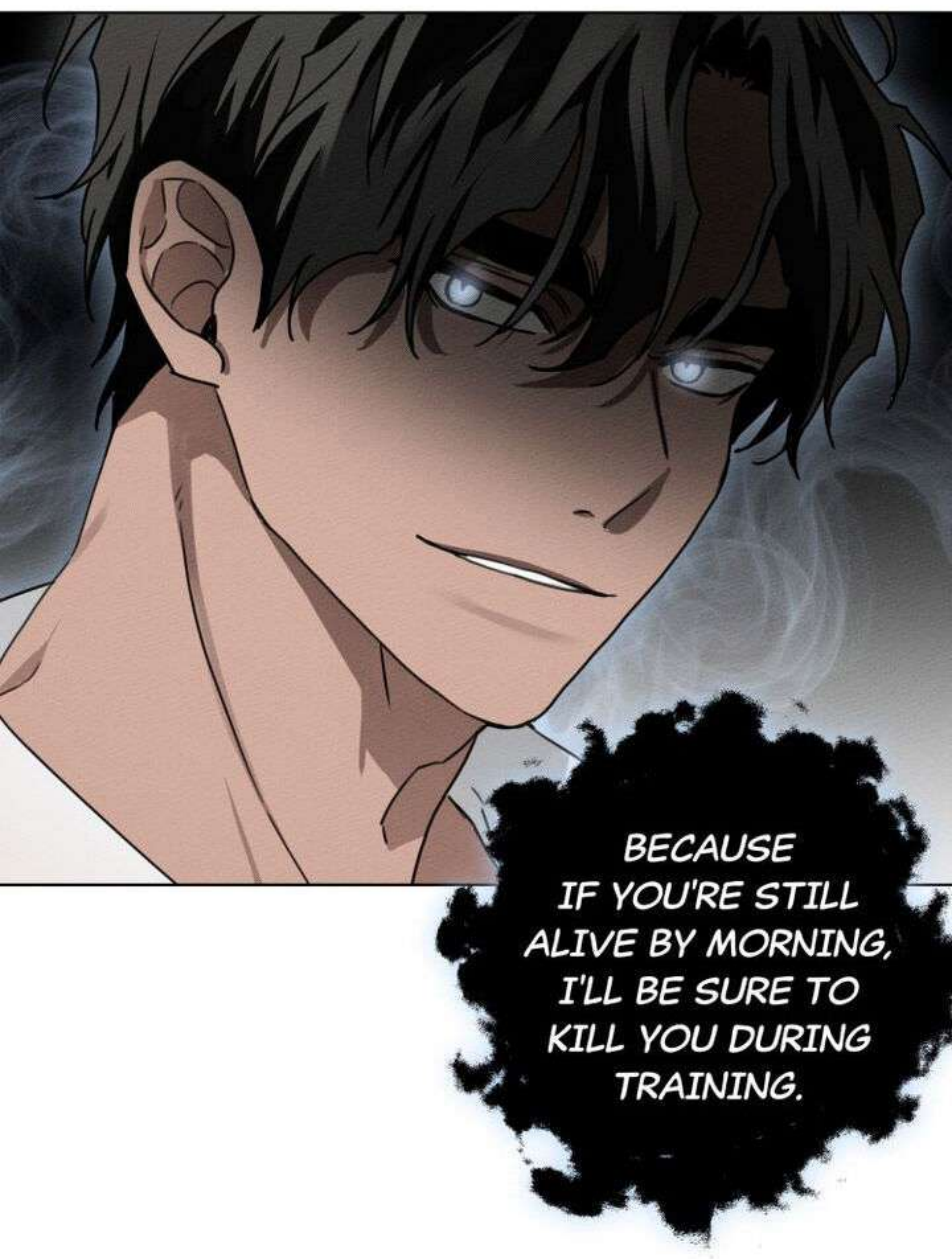

HO- HOW EMBARRASSING.

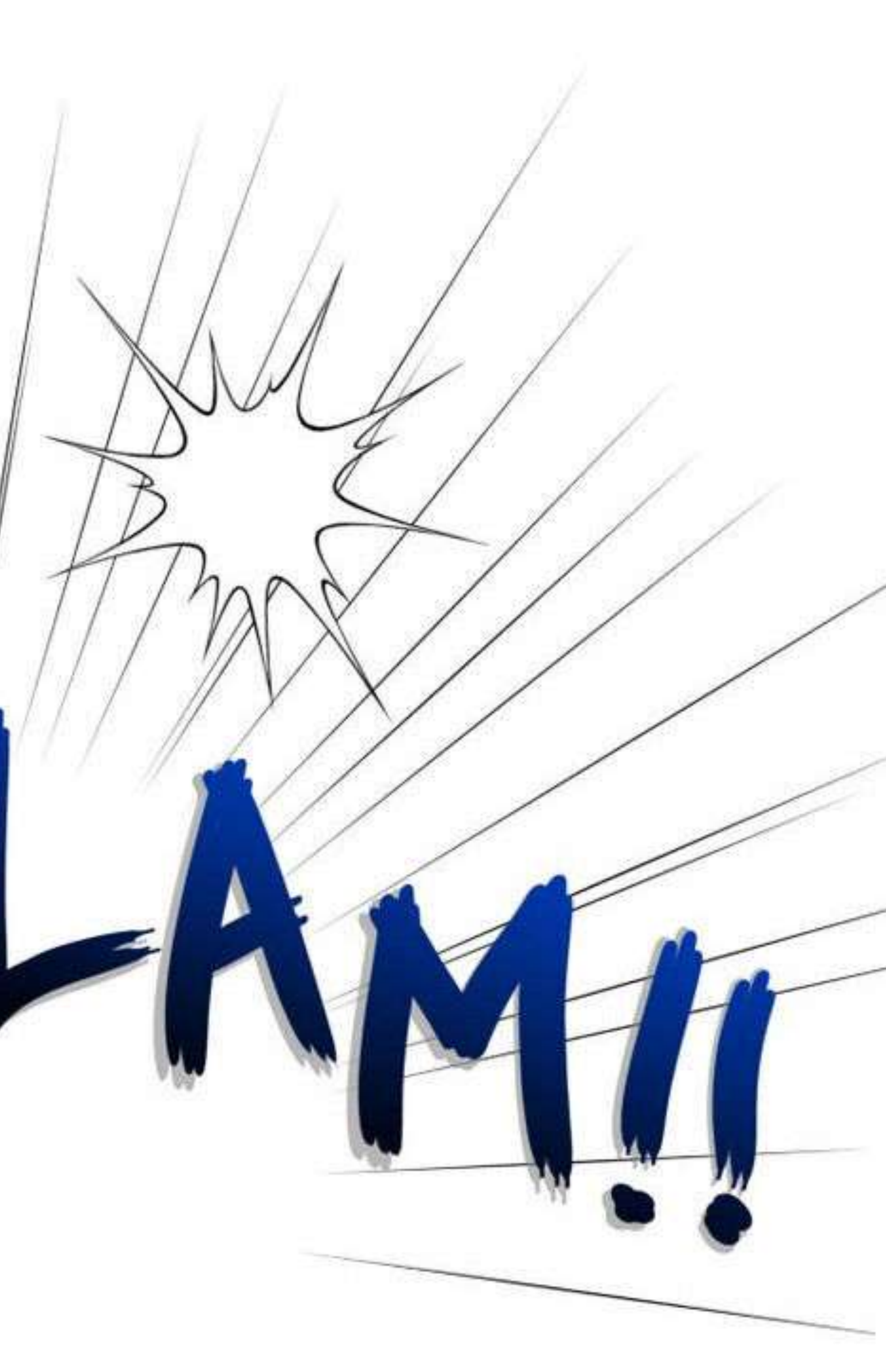

ISN'T THE CAPTAIN THE DRUNK ONE? HIS EYES LOOKED PRETTY GLAZED OVER.
WELL! SINCE THE CAPTAIN IS BUSY TONIGHT, LET'S JUST ENJOY AMONGST OURSELVES!
SNICKER

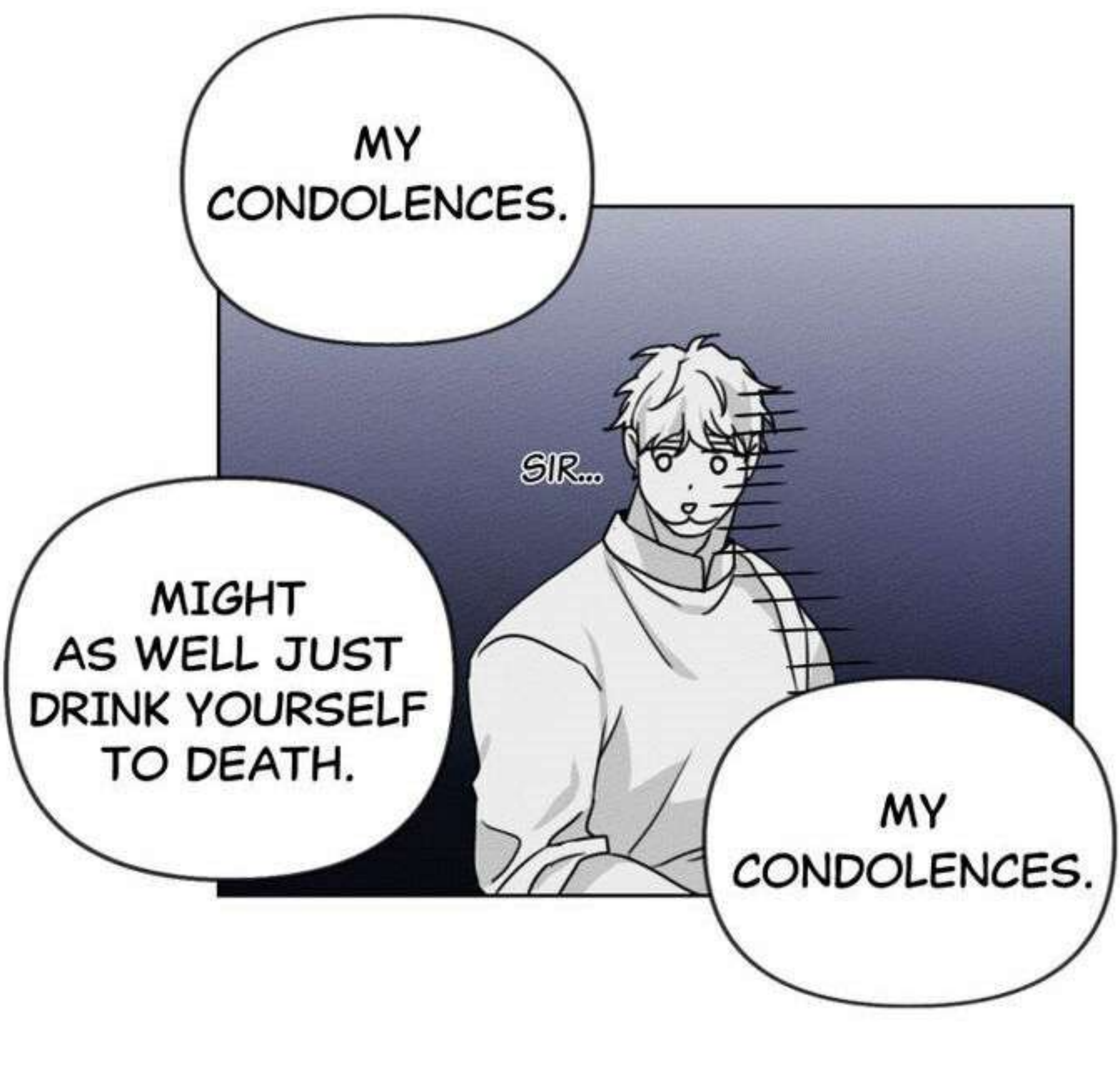

GLARE
OOPS

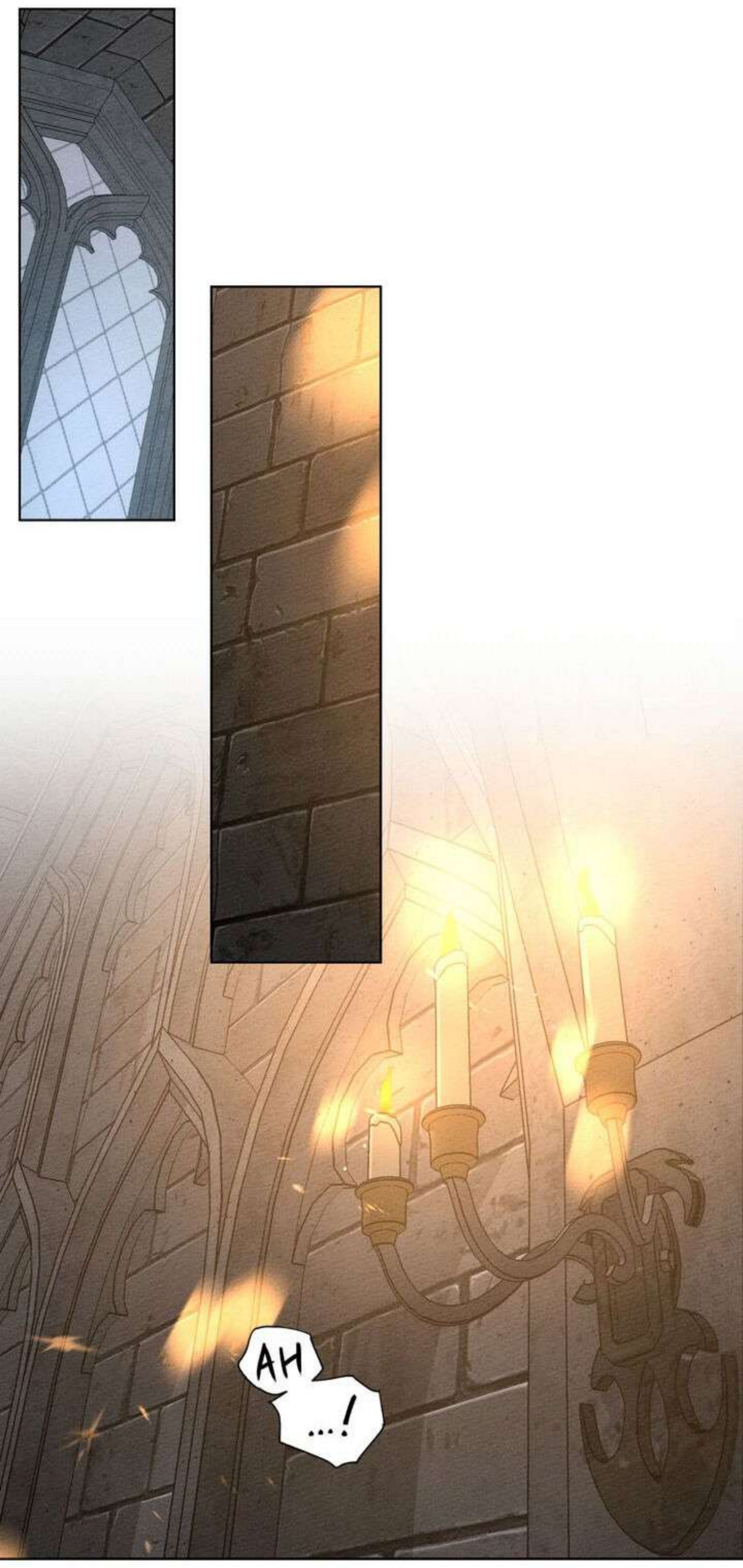

I SUGGEST YOU DRINK INSTEAD OF RUNNING YOUR MOUTH.

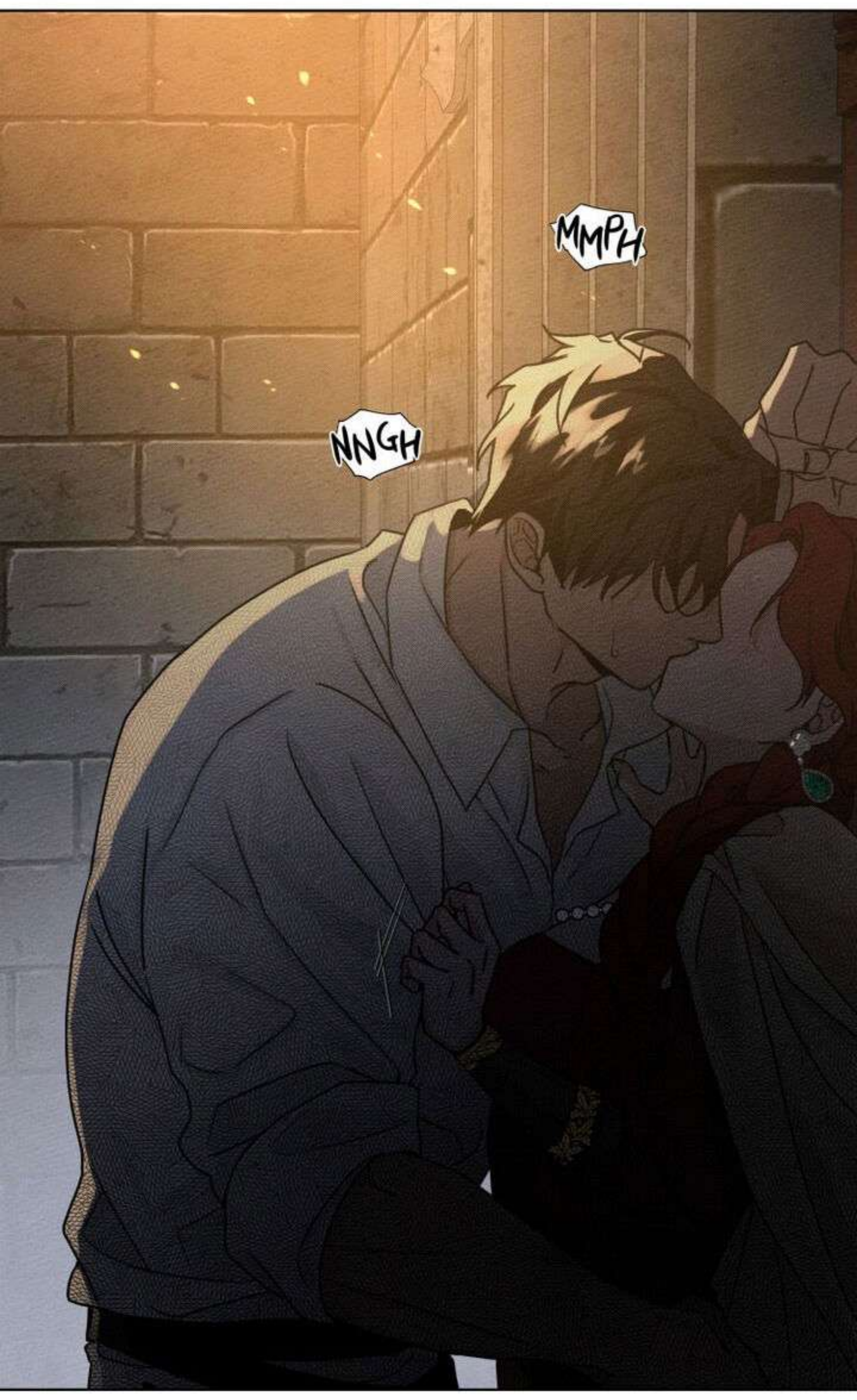


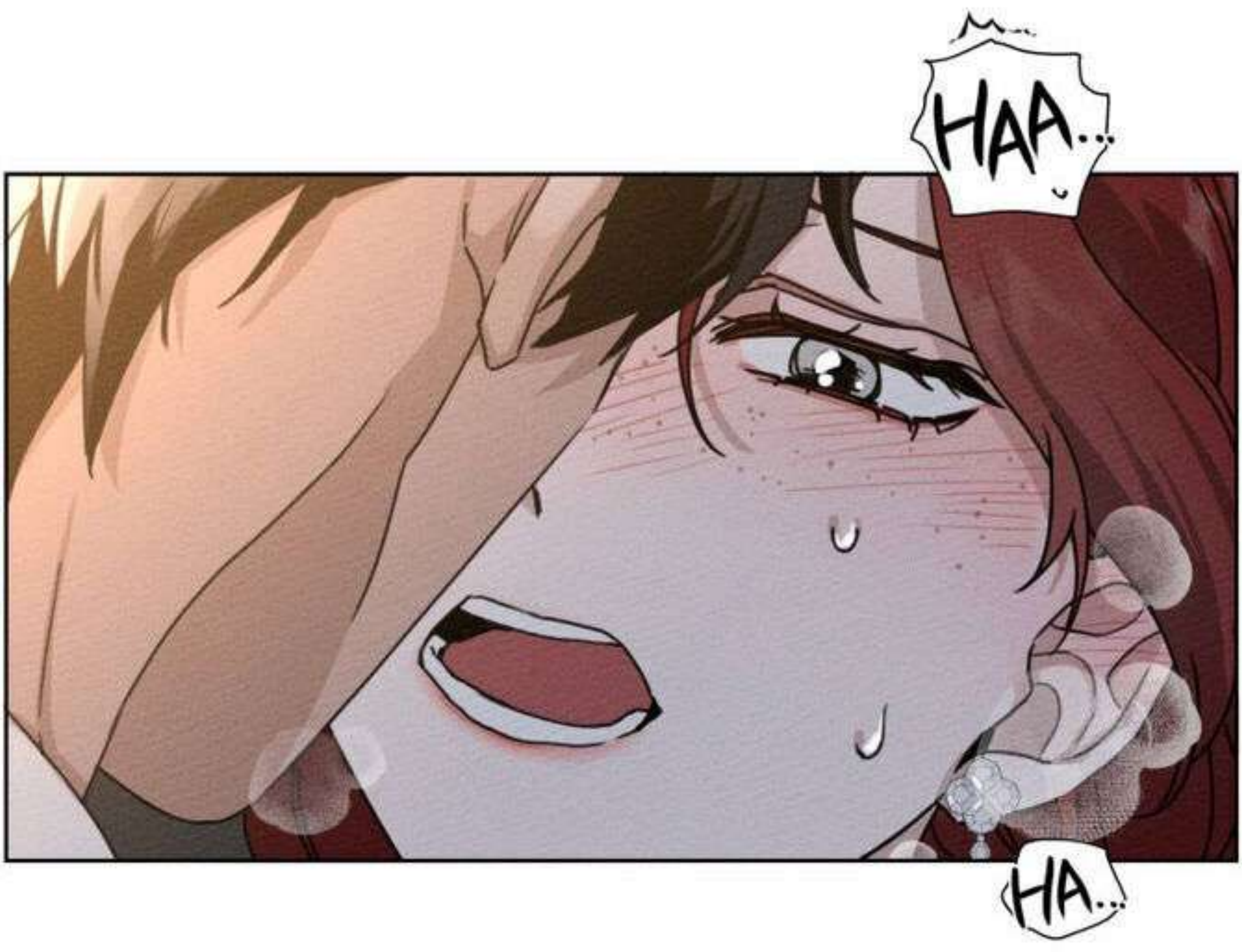

BECAUSE IF YOU'RE STILL ALIVE BY MORNING, I'LL BE SURE TO KILL YOU DURING TRAINING.

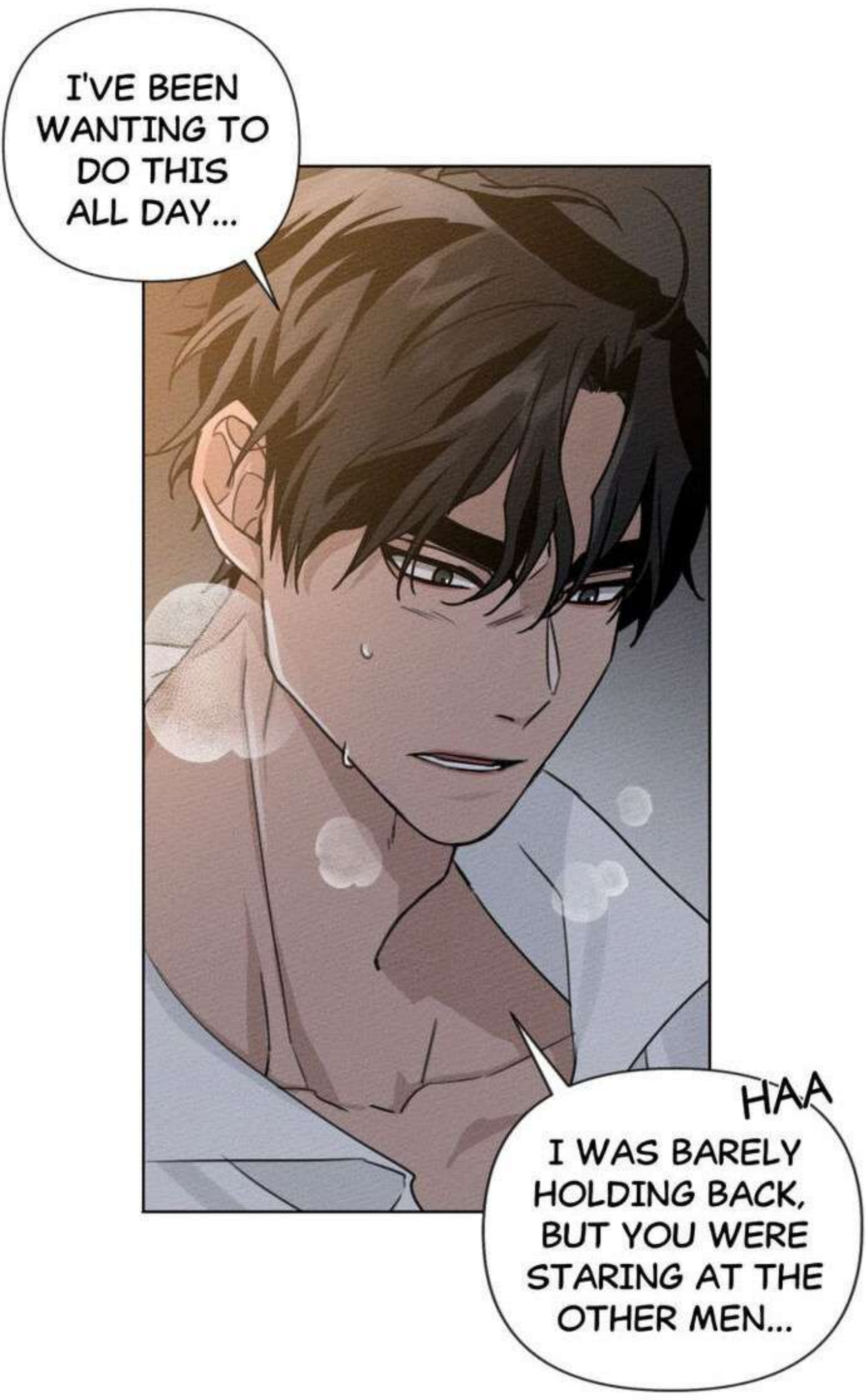

SLAM!!

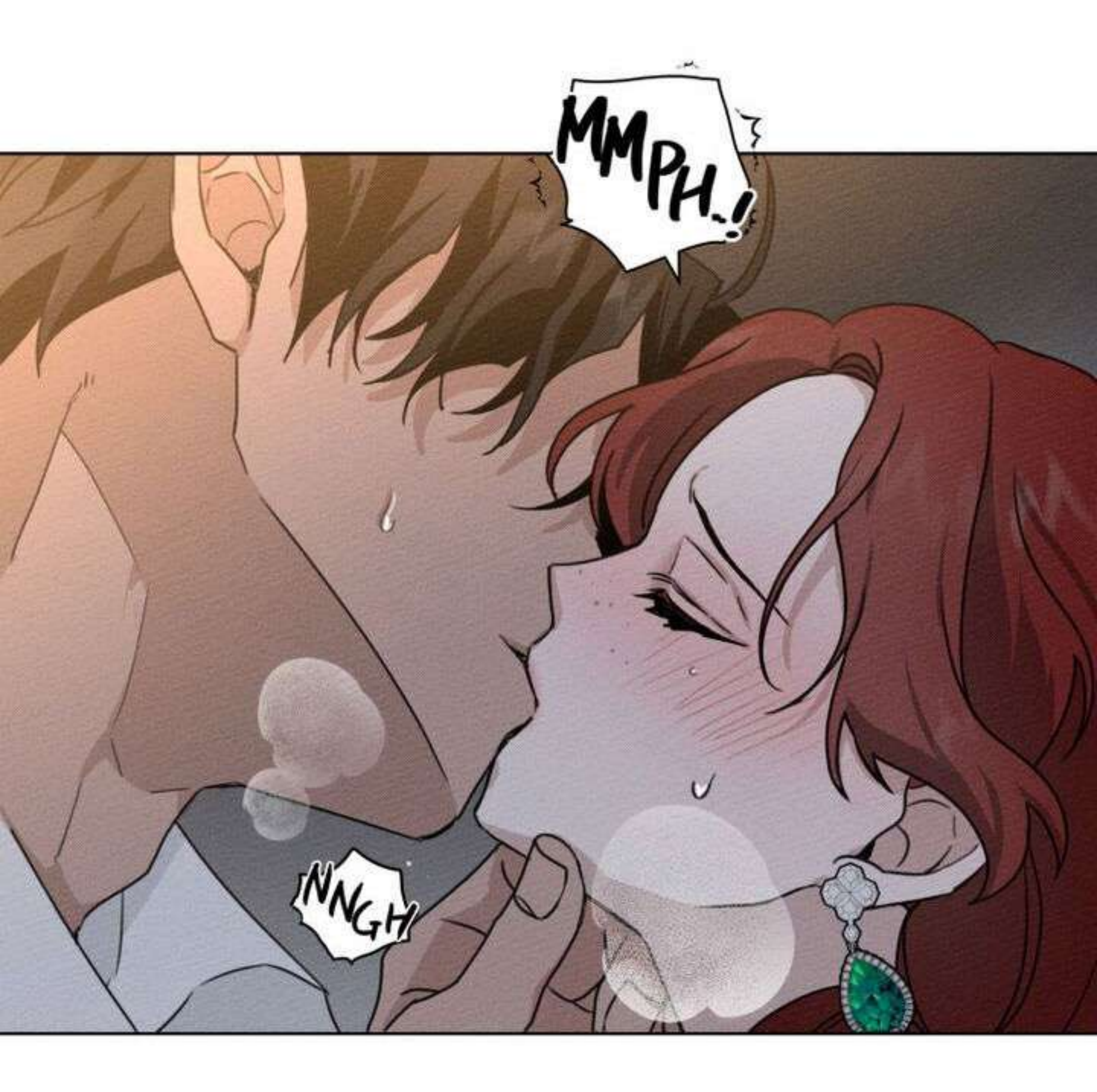

MY CONDOLENCES.
SIR...
MIGHT AS WELL JUST DRINK YOURSELF TO DEATH.
MY CONDOLENCES.

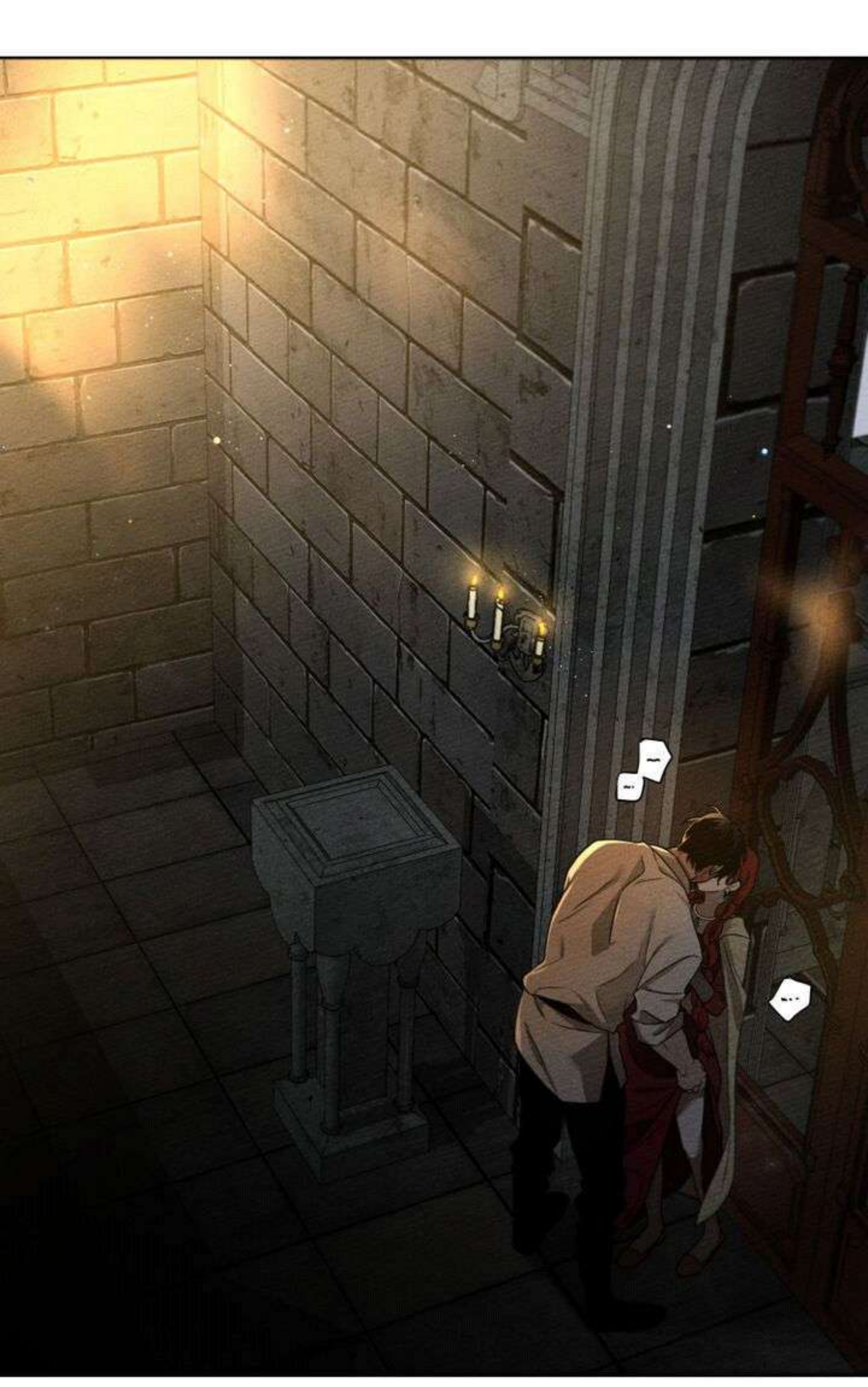

AH
...!

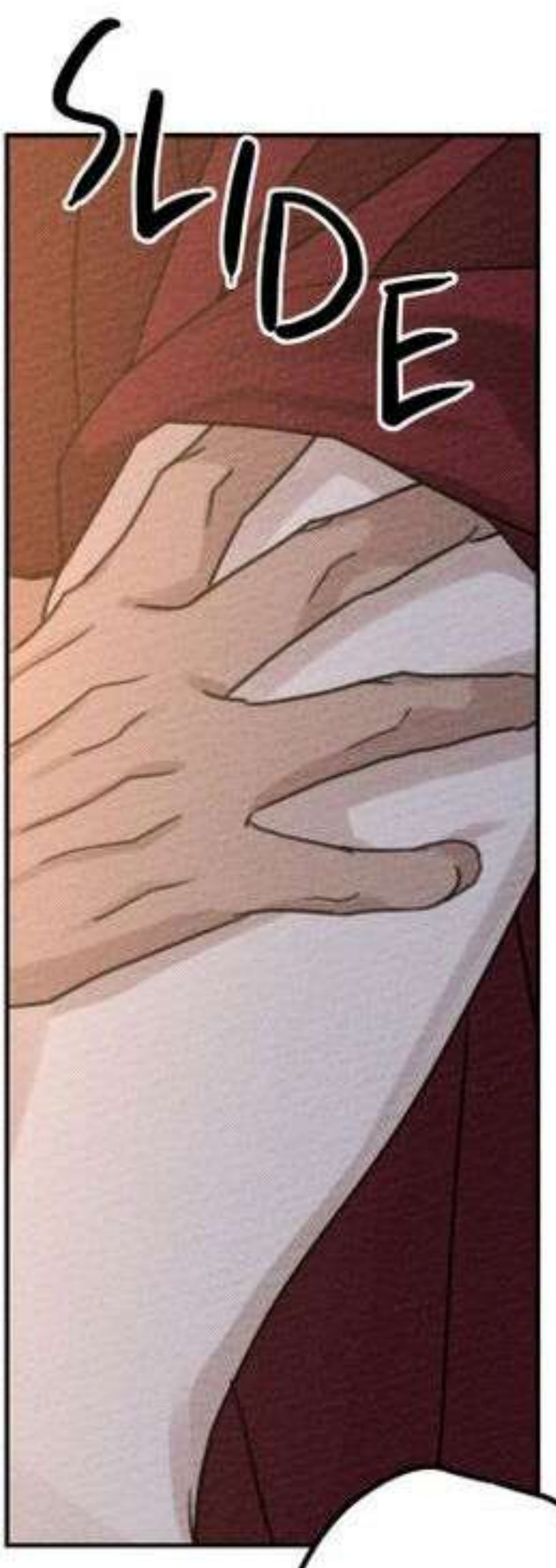

MMPH
NNGH

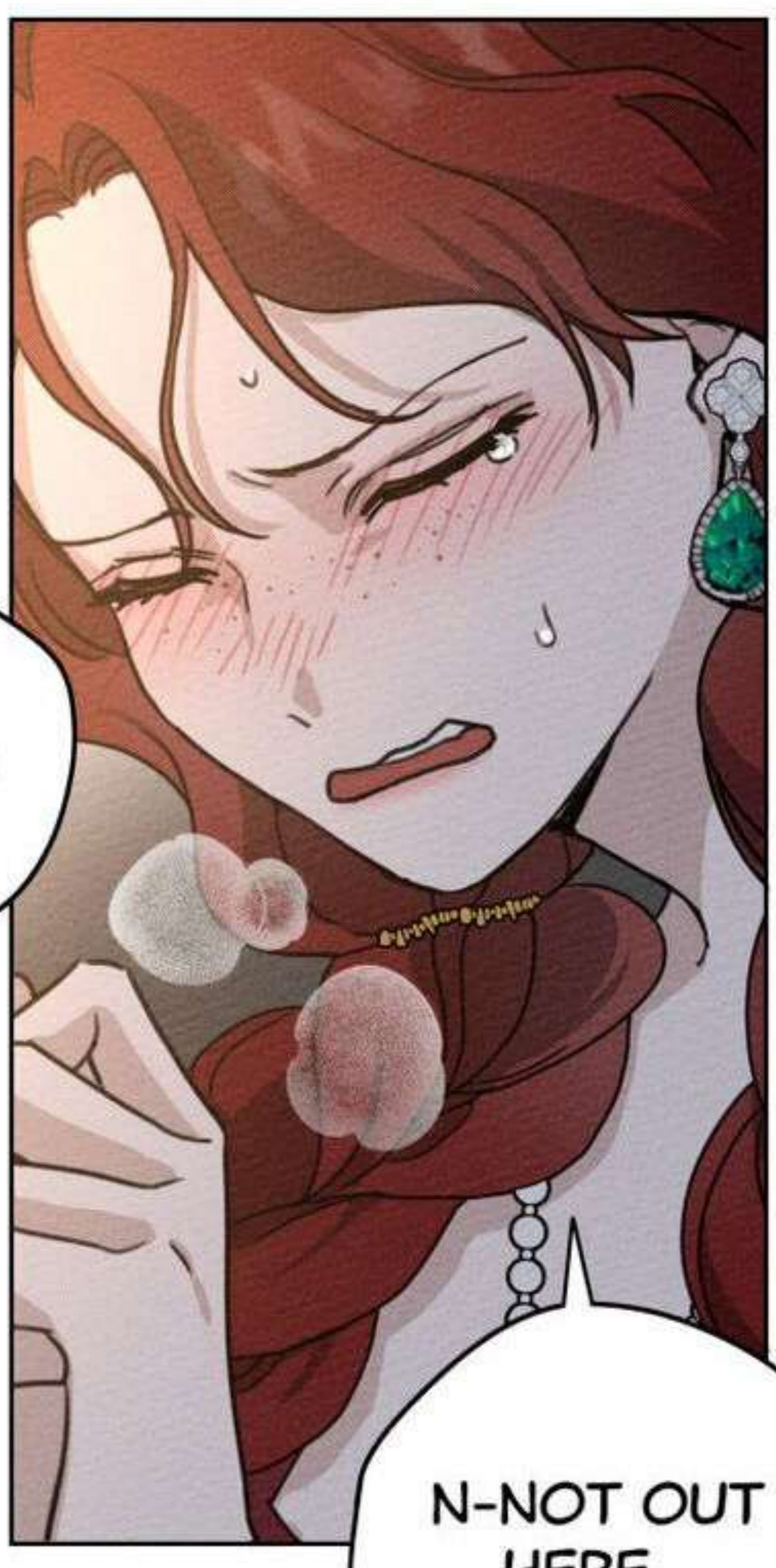

HAA...
HA...

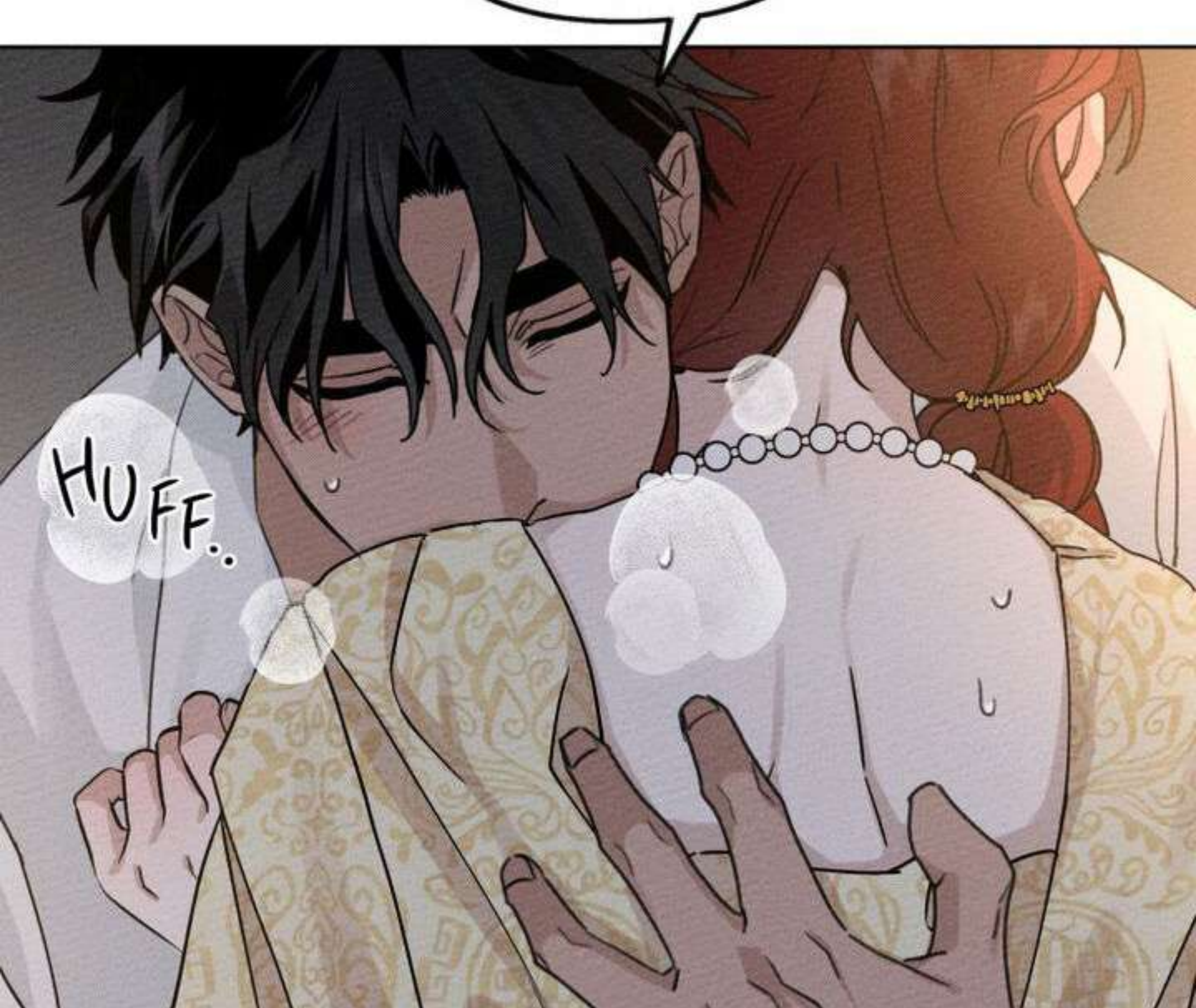

I'VE BEEN WANTING TO DO THIS ALL DAY...
HAA
I WAS BARELY HOLDING BACK, BUT YOU WERE STARING AT THE OTHER MEN...

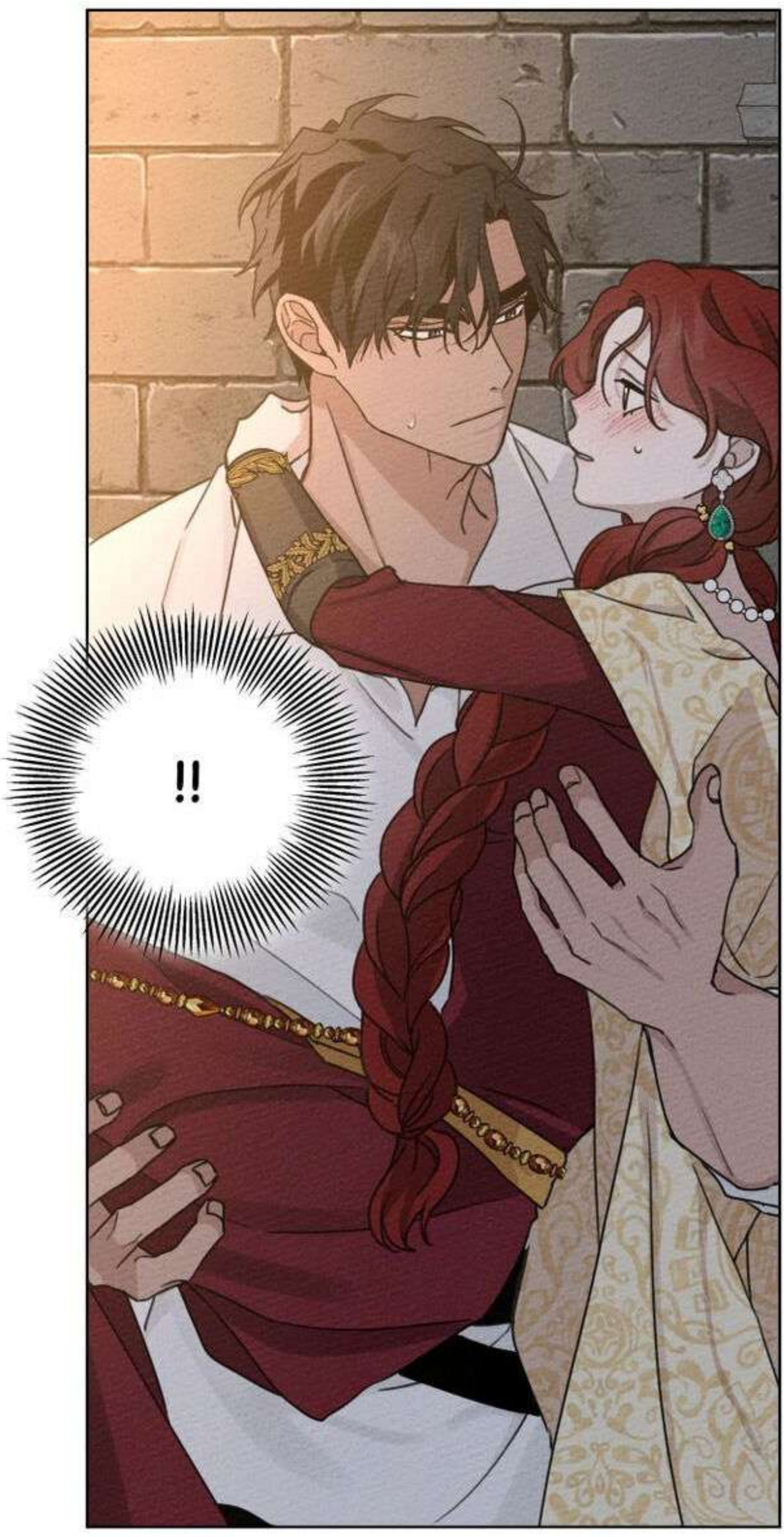

MMPH..!
NNGH

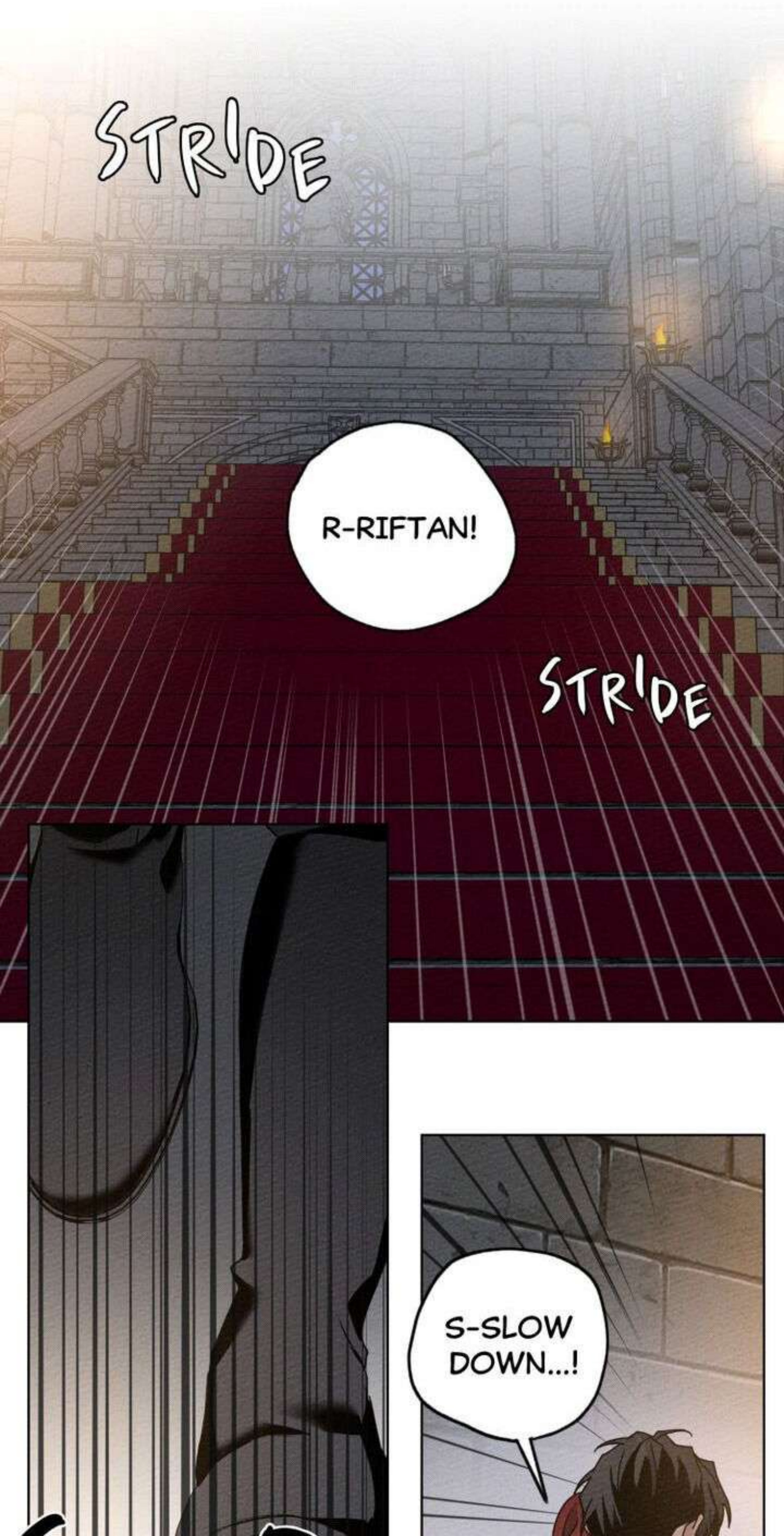



SLIDE

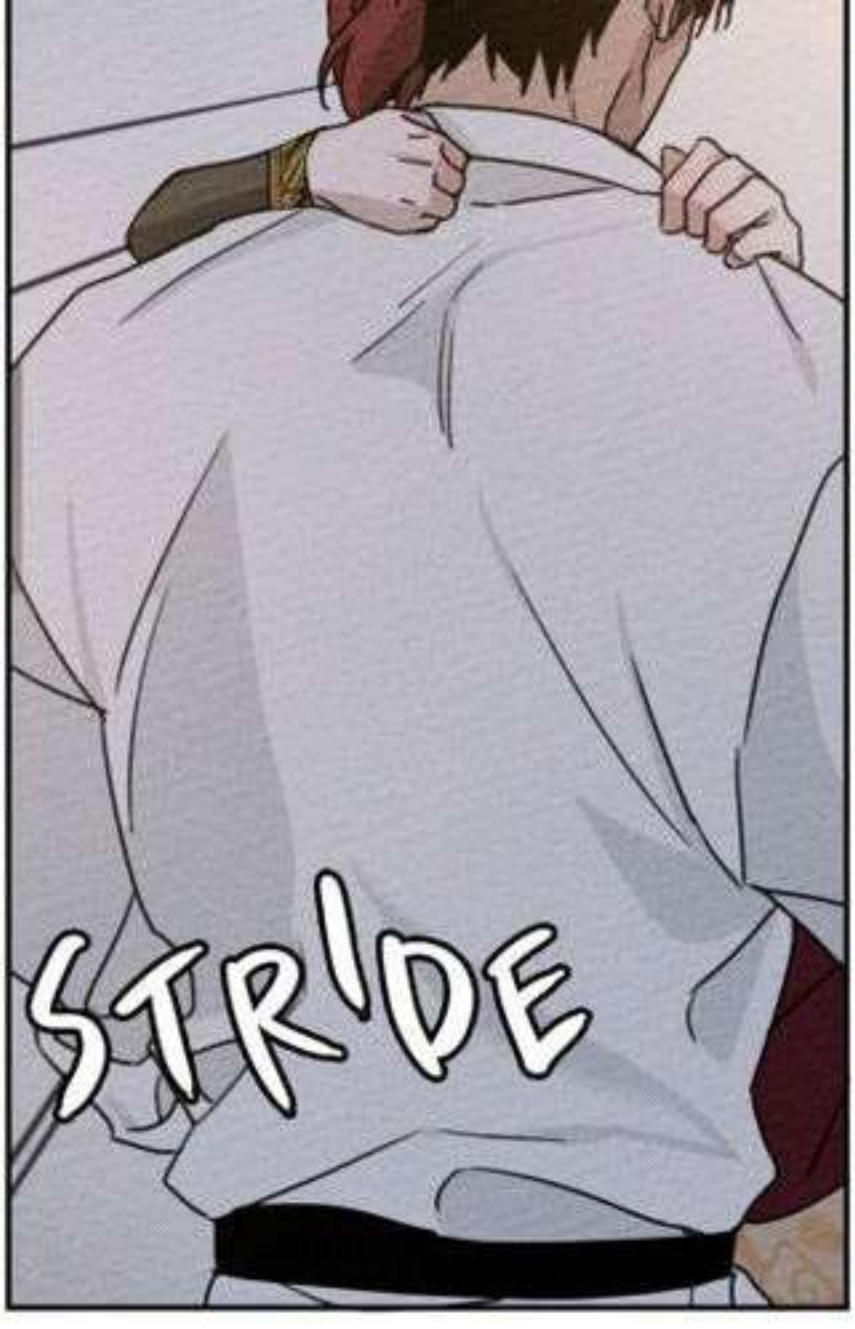

N-NO...!
N-NOT OUT HERE...

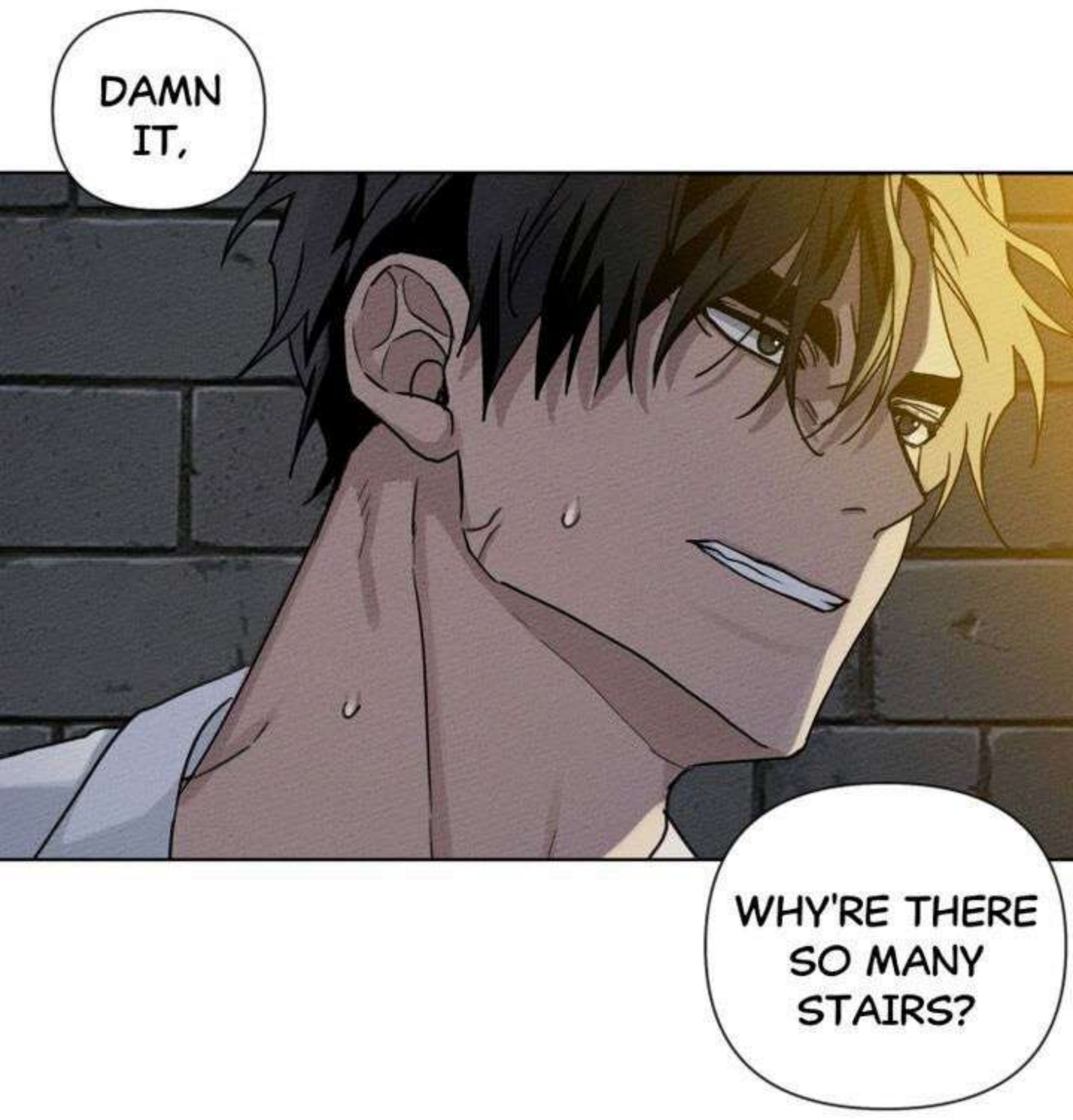

I WANT TO FEEL YOU RIGHT HERE AND NOW...
HUFF..

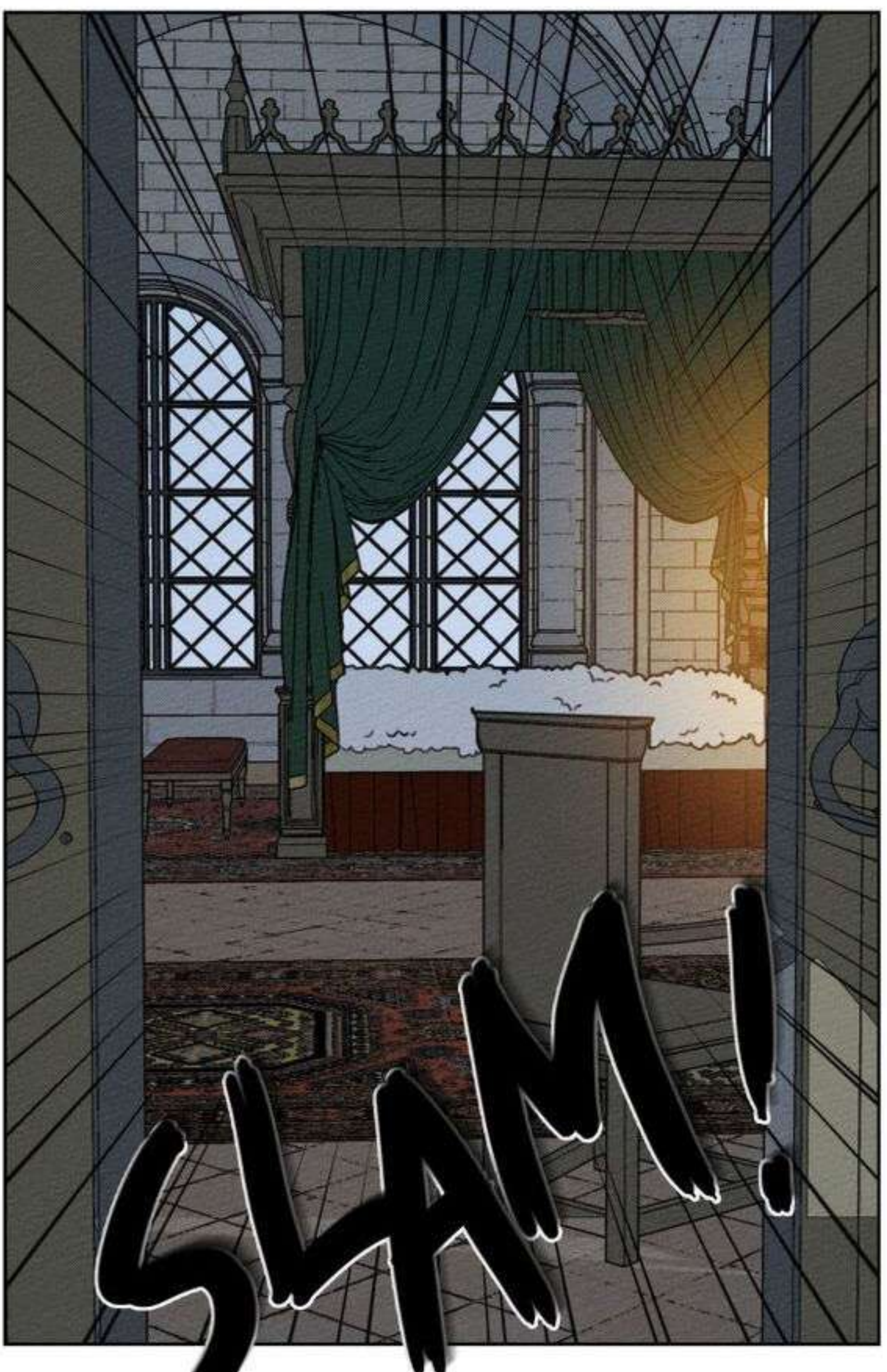

!!


STRIDE
R-RIFTAN!
STRIDE
S-SLOW DOWN...!

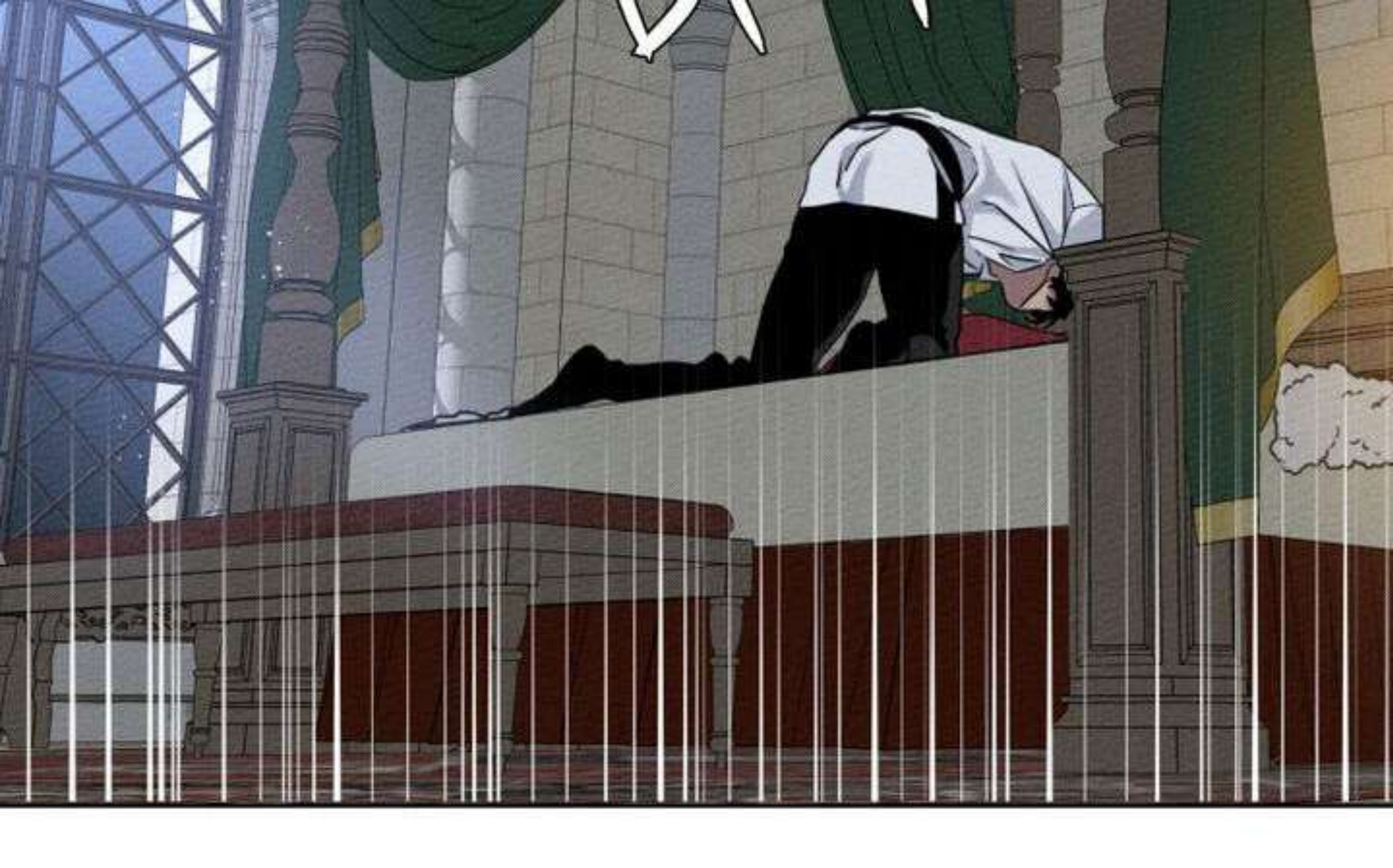
STEP

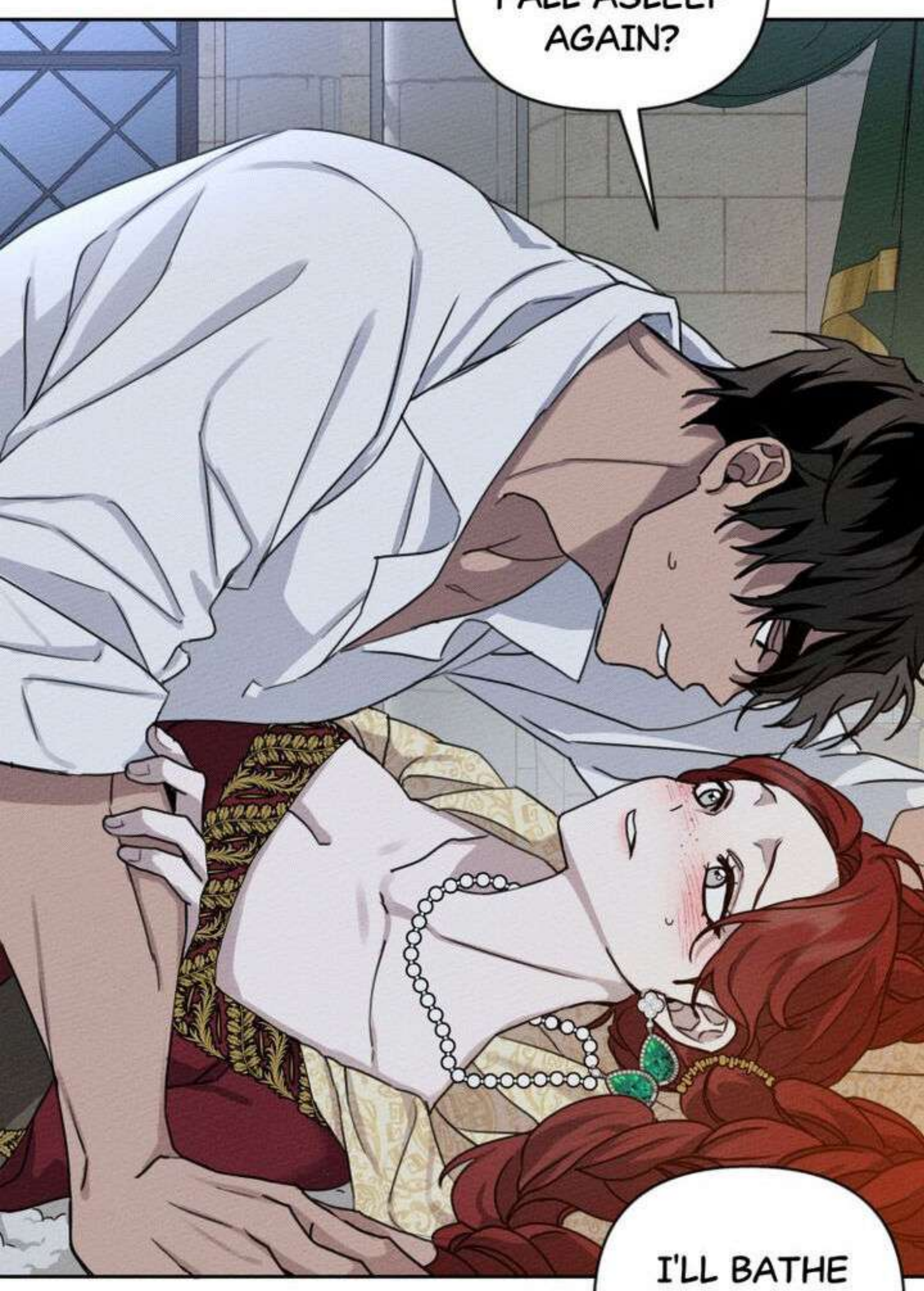

STRIDE

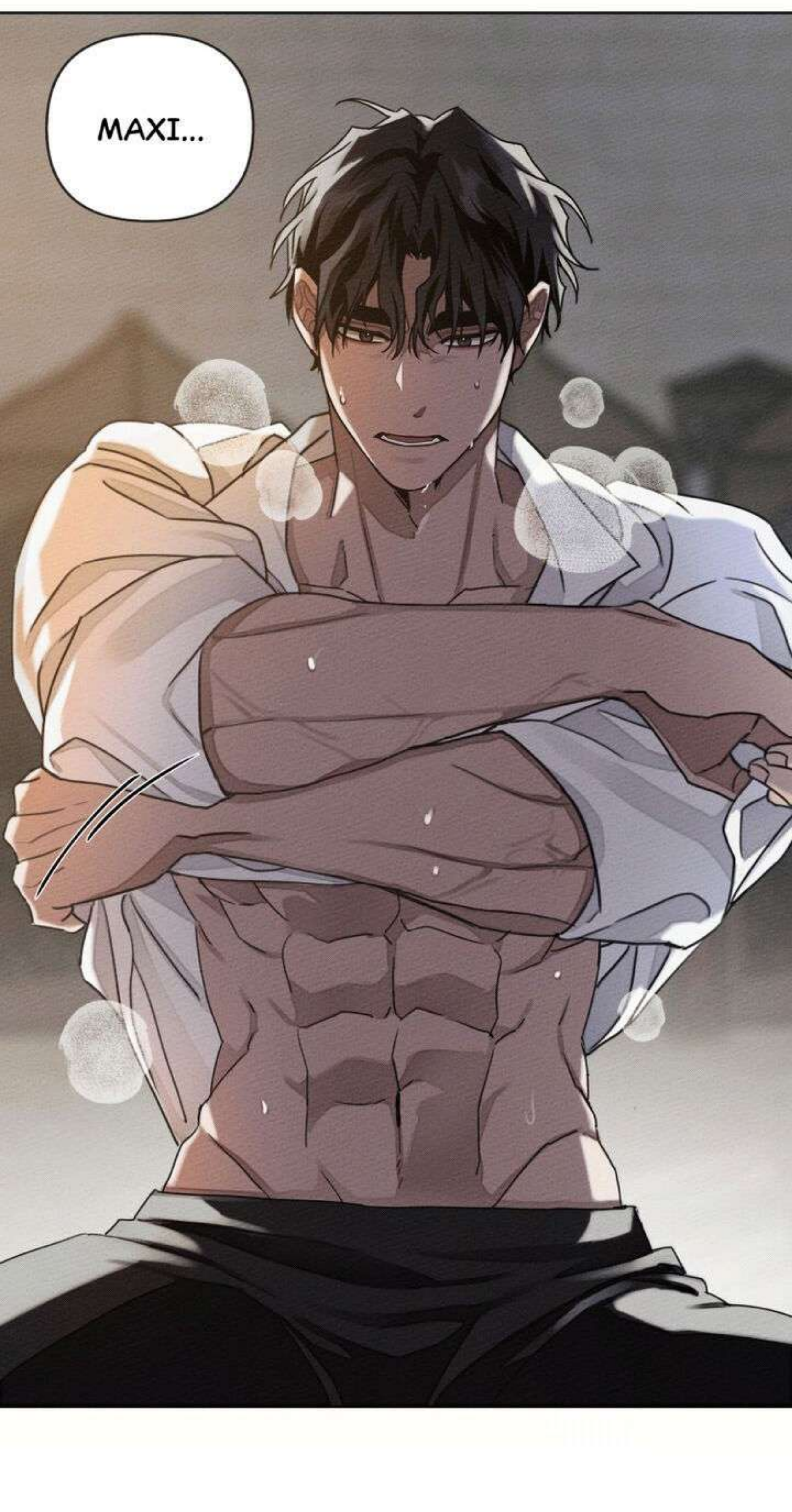

DAMN IT,
WHY'RE THERE SO MANY STAIRS?

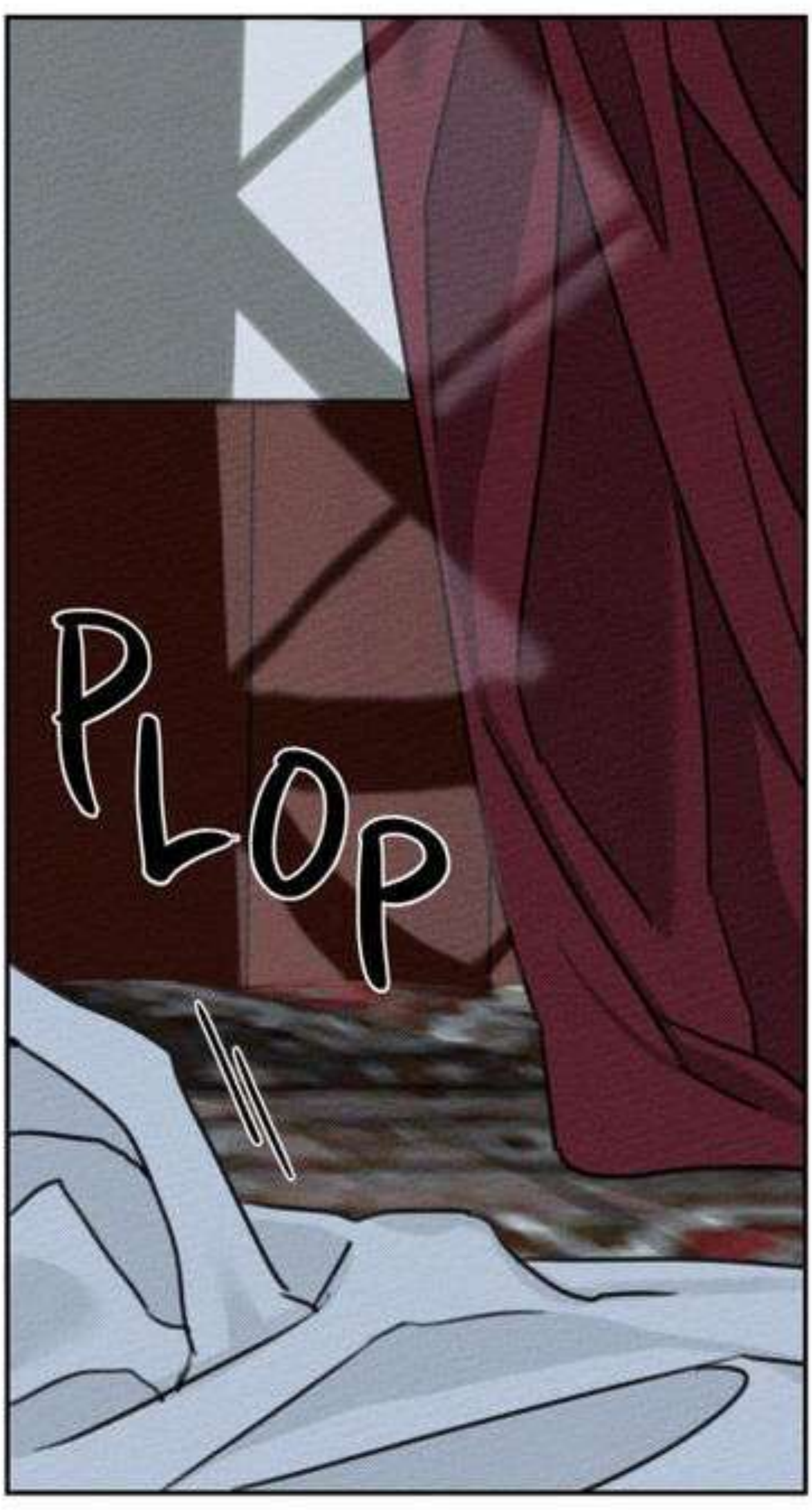

SLAM!

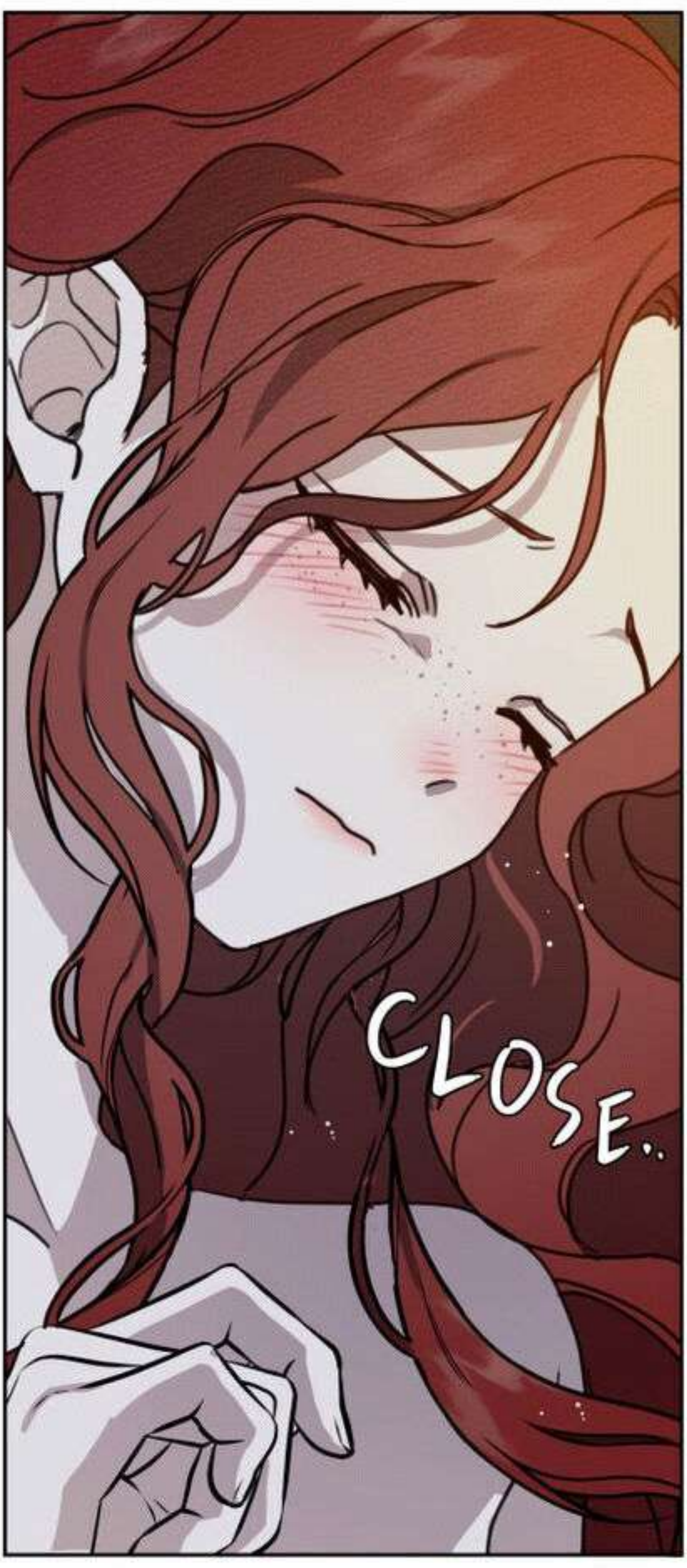
DROP



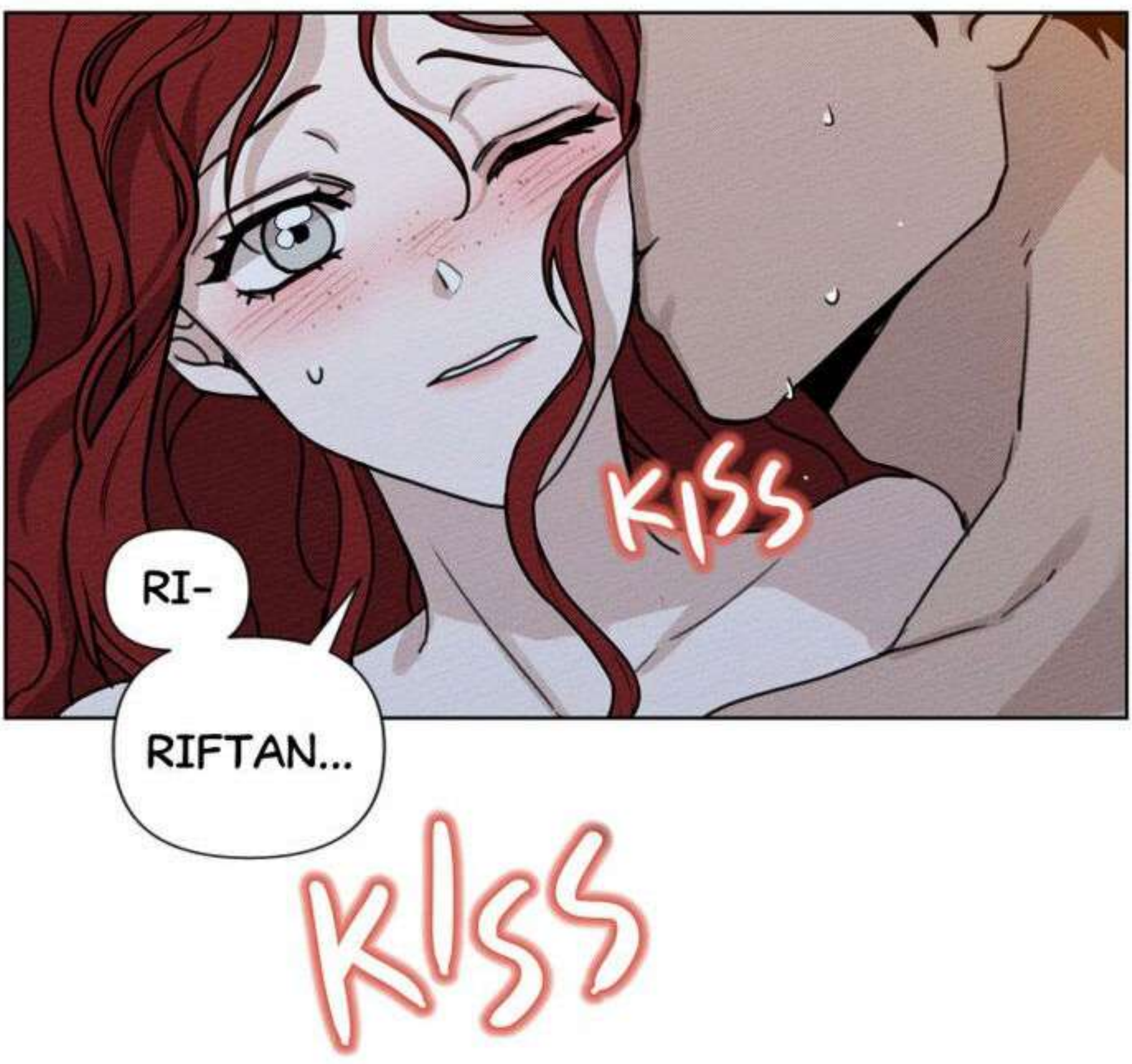

WE-
WE SHOULD BATHE FIRST...
SO YOU CAN FALL ASLEEP AGAIN?
I'LL BATHE YOU LATER... SO JUST...
LET ME HAVE YOU. PLEASE.


MAXI...


PLOP


CLOSE..

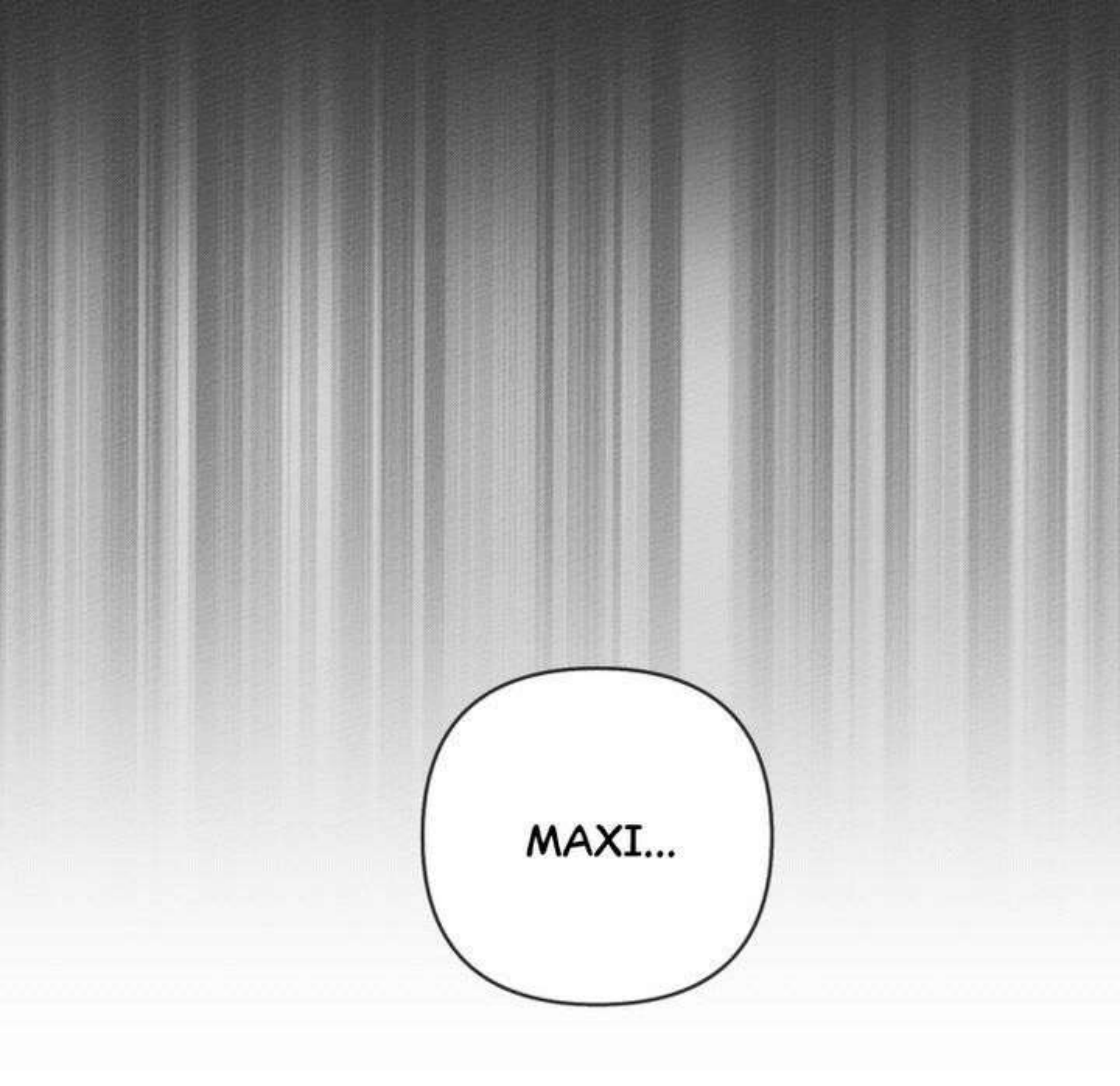
LEAN

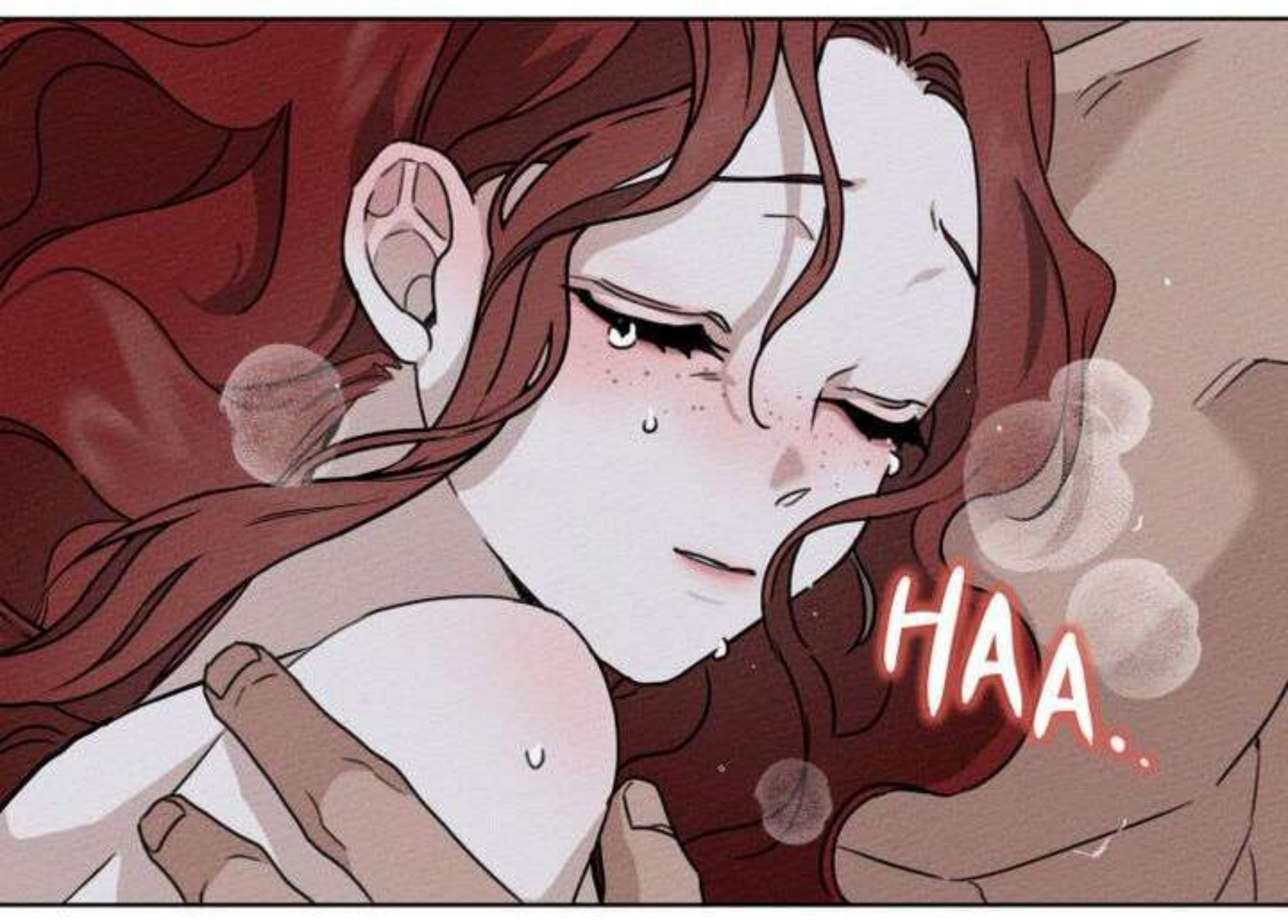

KISS
RI-
RIFTAN...
KISS

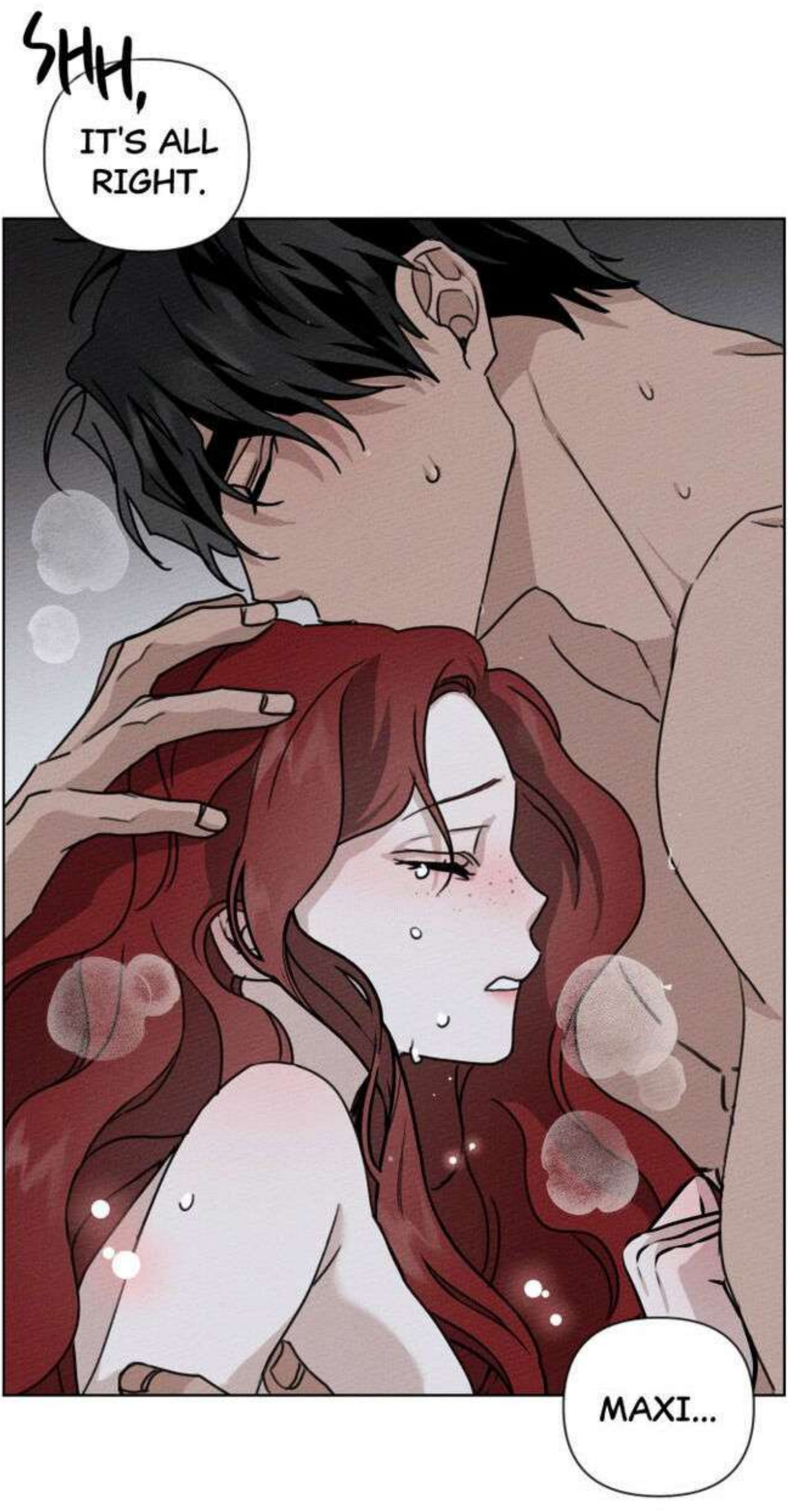
AH.

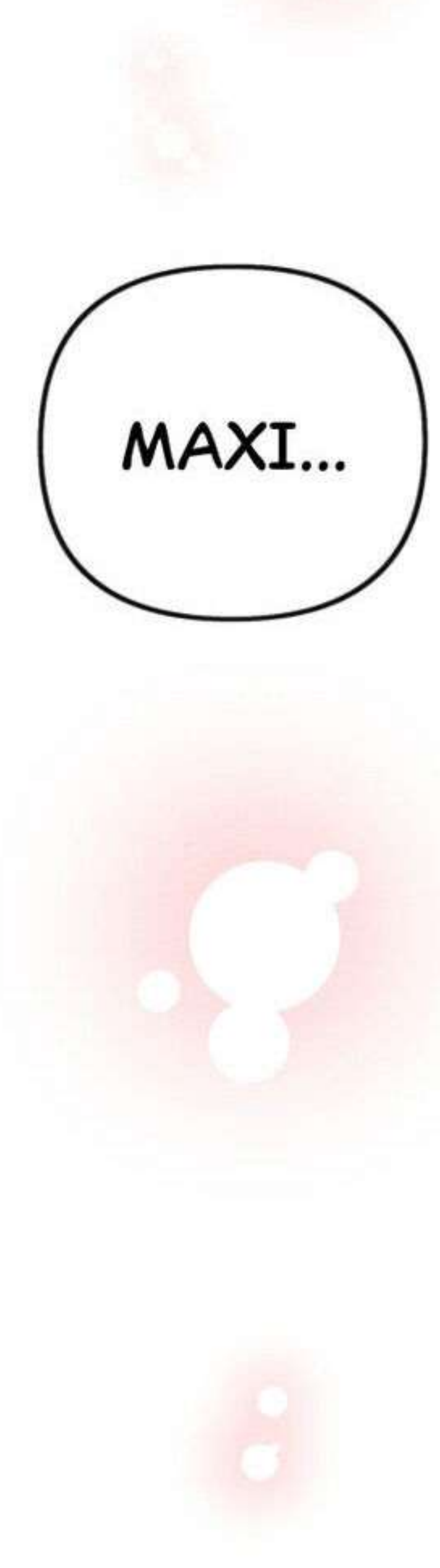
KISS
CLENCH
MY BODY'S... BURNING...

YOU MUST STAY AS STILL AS A CORPSE.
SHATTER
AS A VIRTUOUS WIFE...
WHO'D EVER WANT A WRETCH LIKE YOU?!

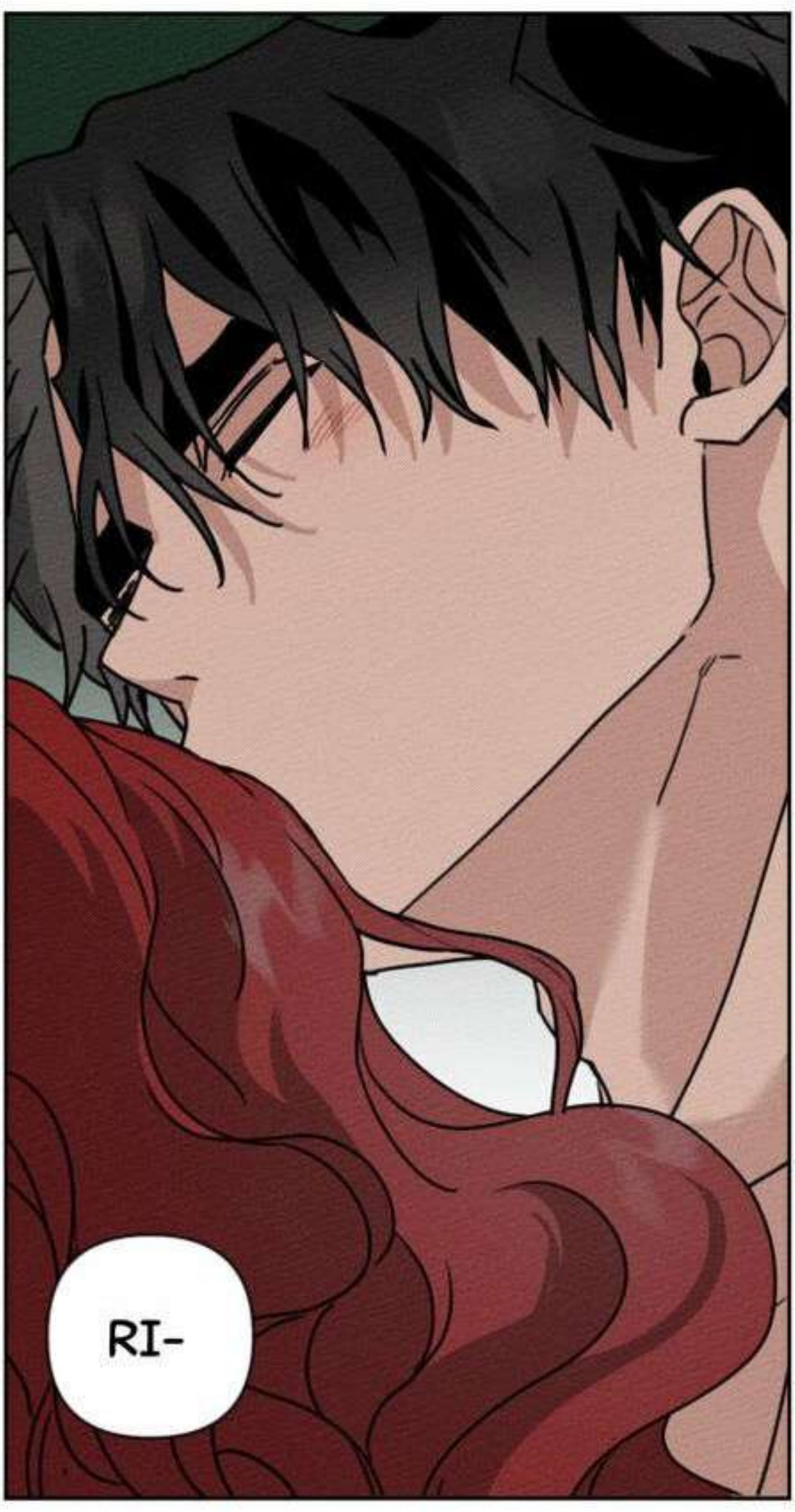

MAXI...

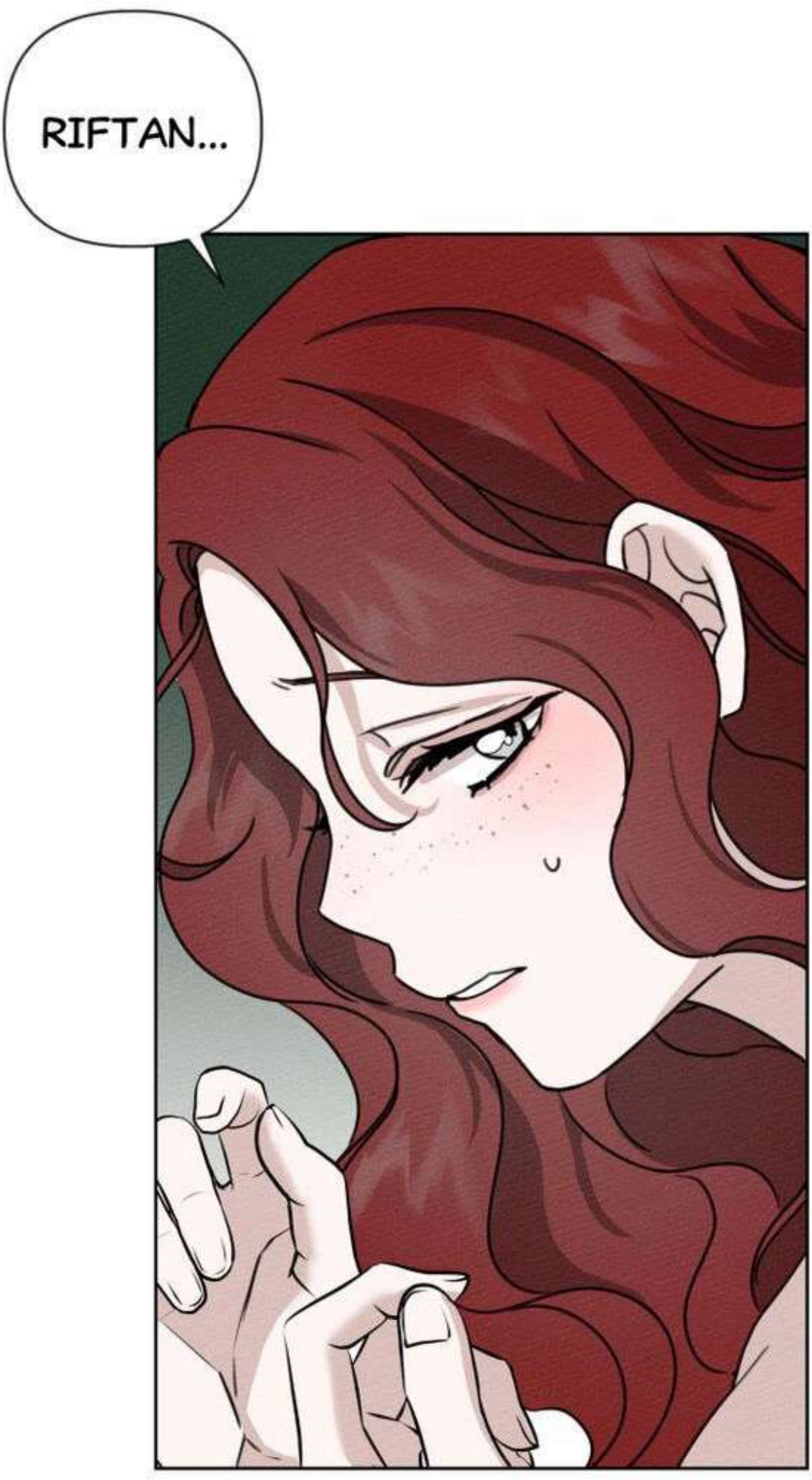

HAA..

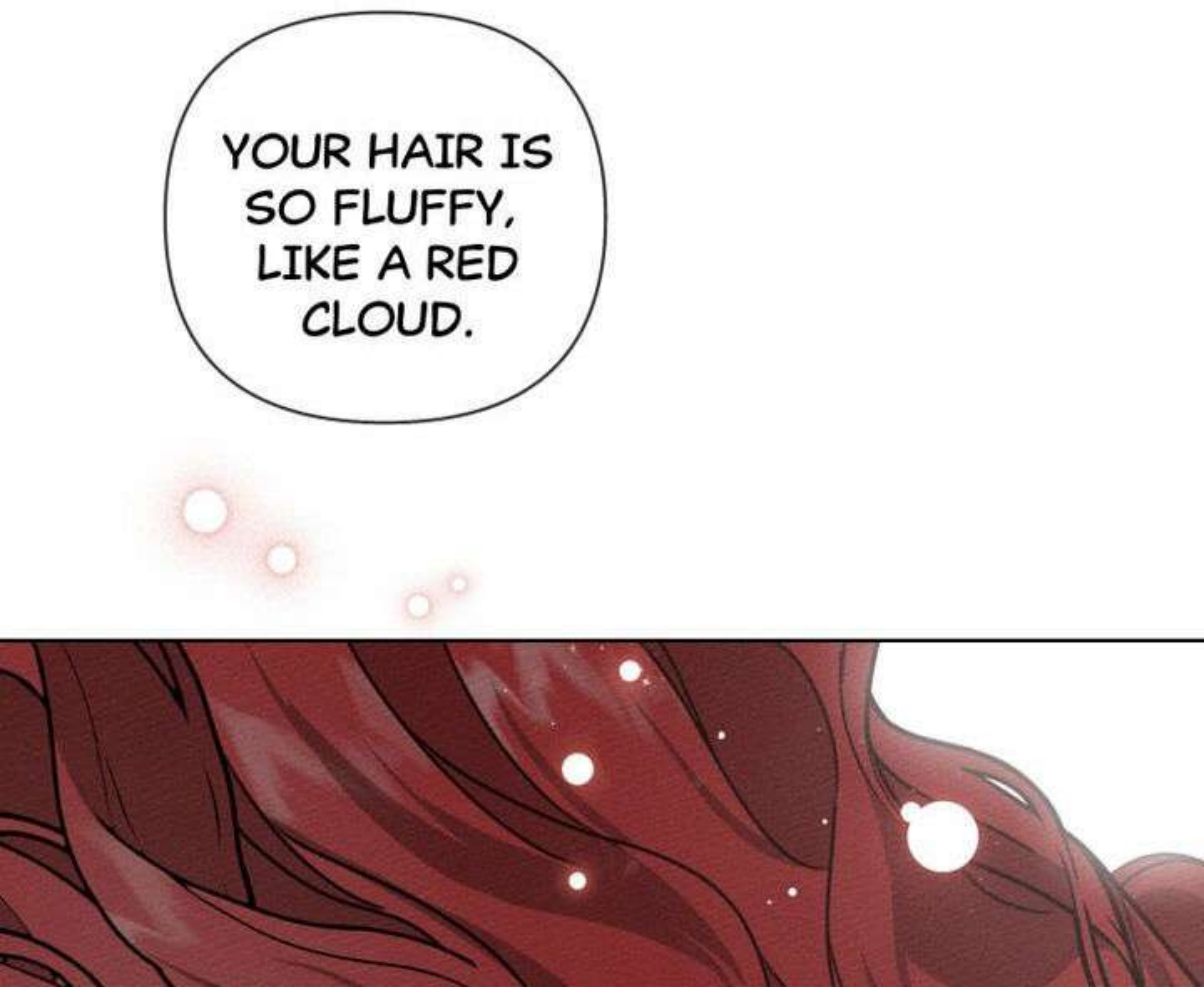

SHH,
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
MAXI...

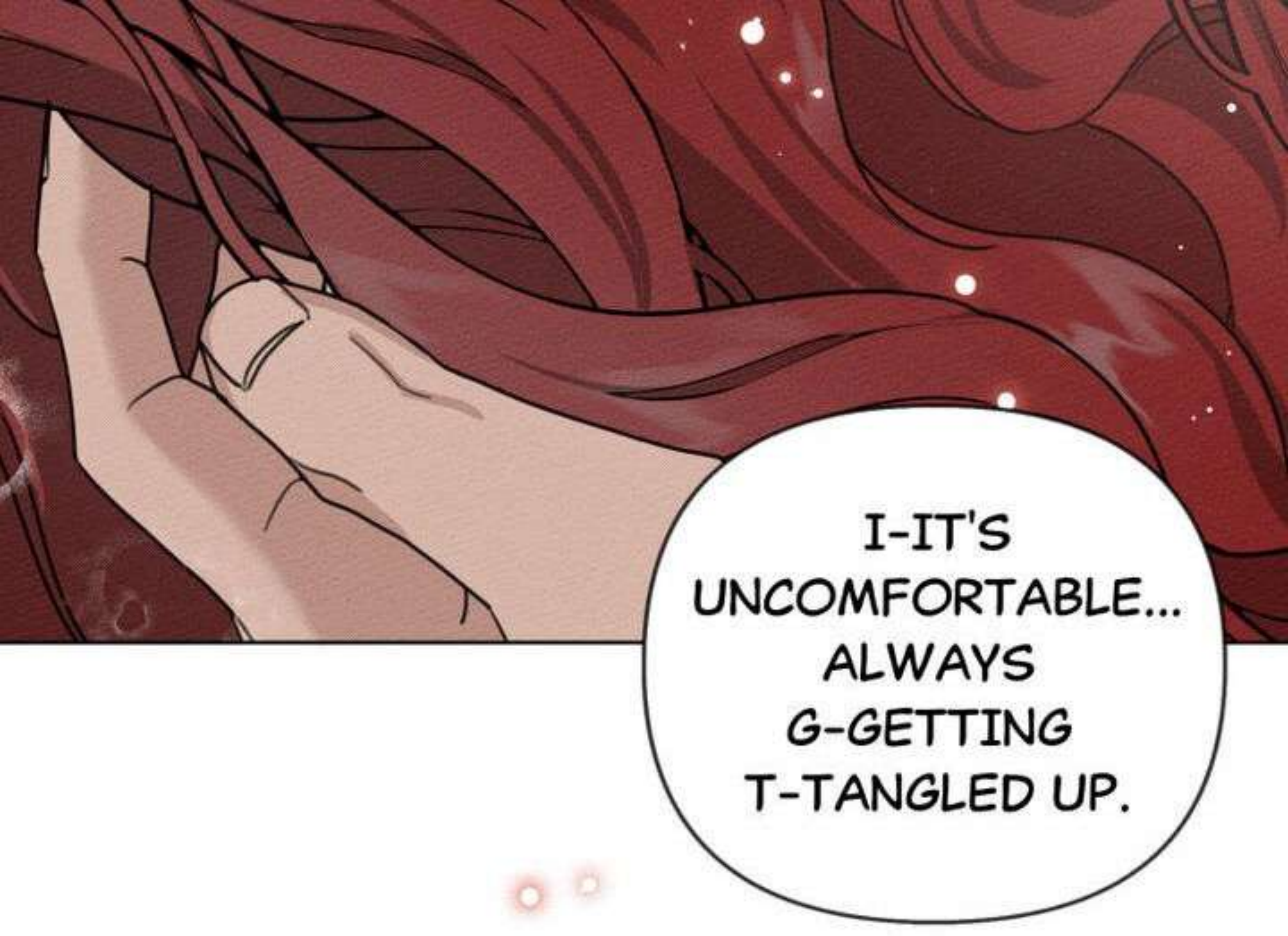

MAXI...

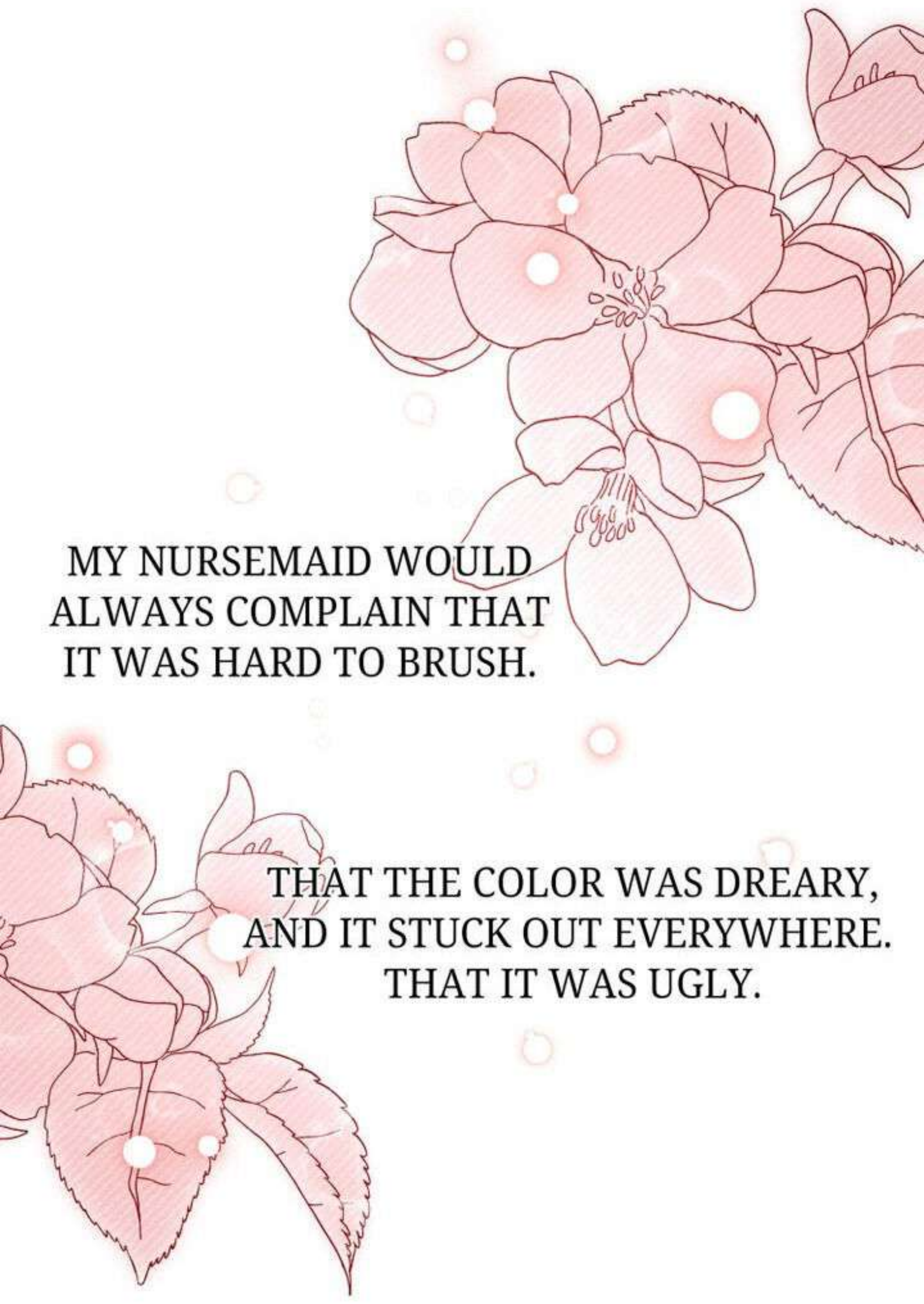
SHH—
PATTER
PATTER
PATTER


RI-


RIFTAN...

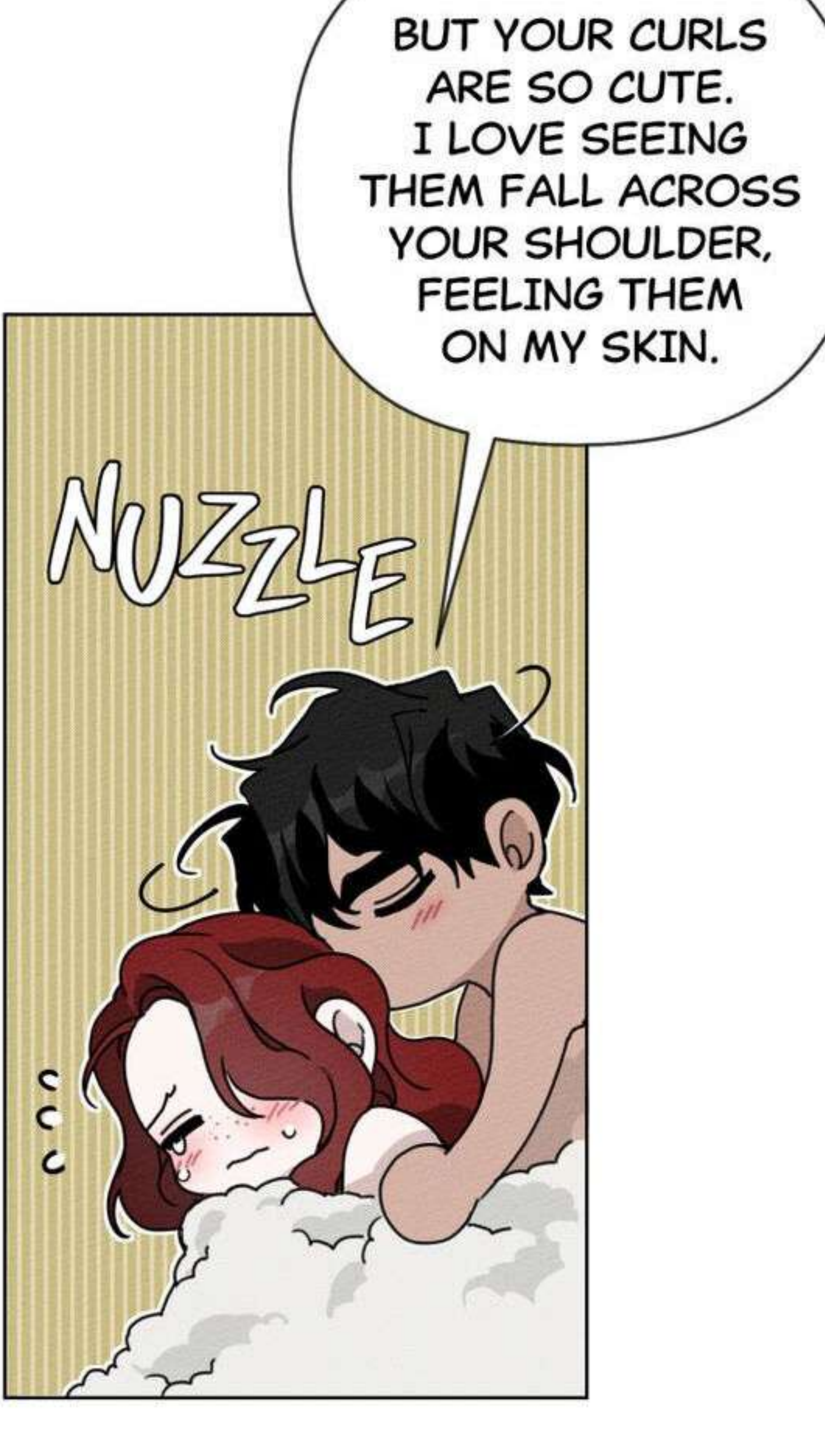

YOUR HAIR IS SO FLUFFY, LIKE A RED CLOUD.


I-IT'S UNCOMFORTABLE... ALWAYS G-GETTING T-TANGLED UP.

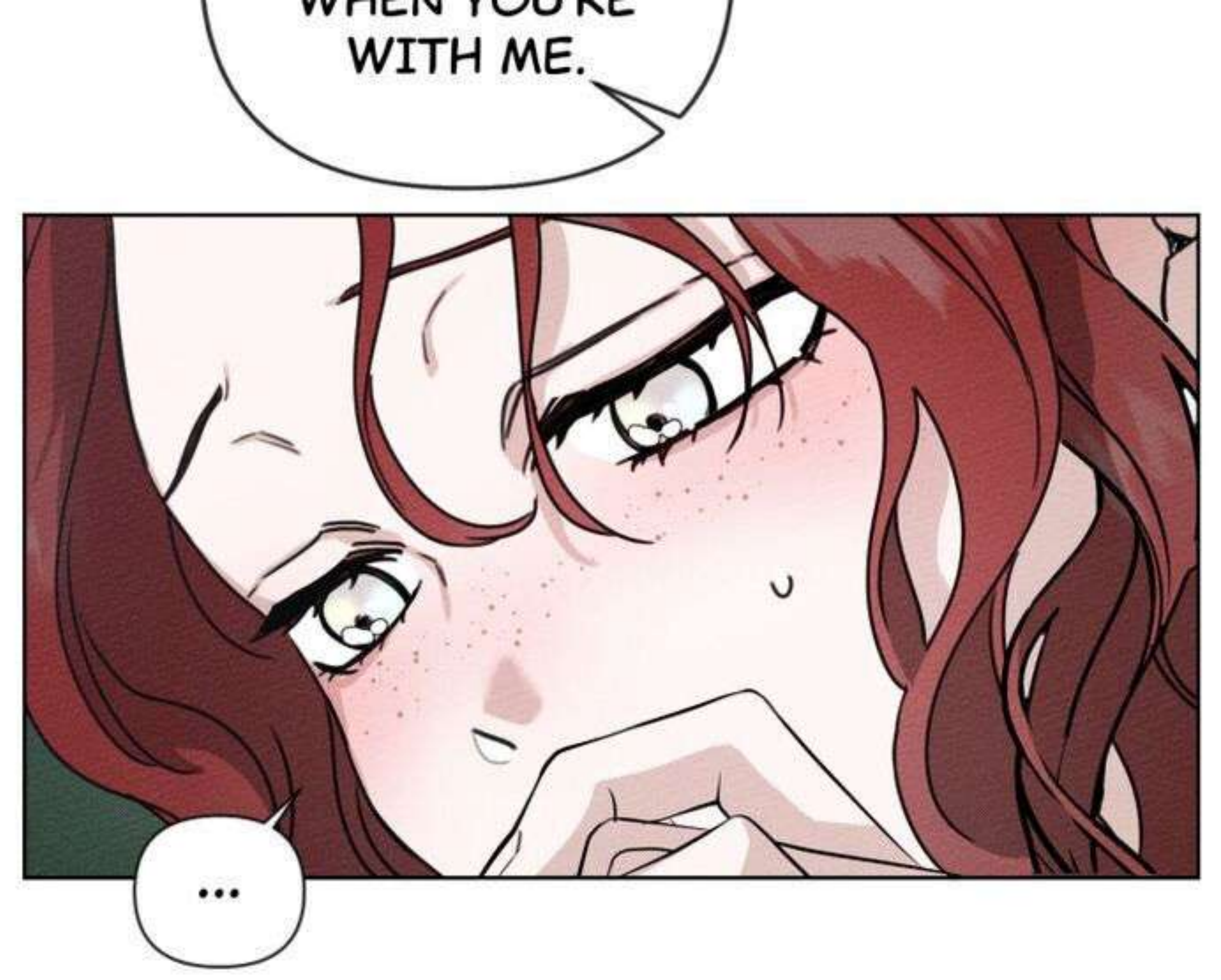


MY NURSEMAID WOULD ALWAYS COMPLAIN THAT IT WAS HARD TO BRUSH.

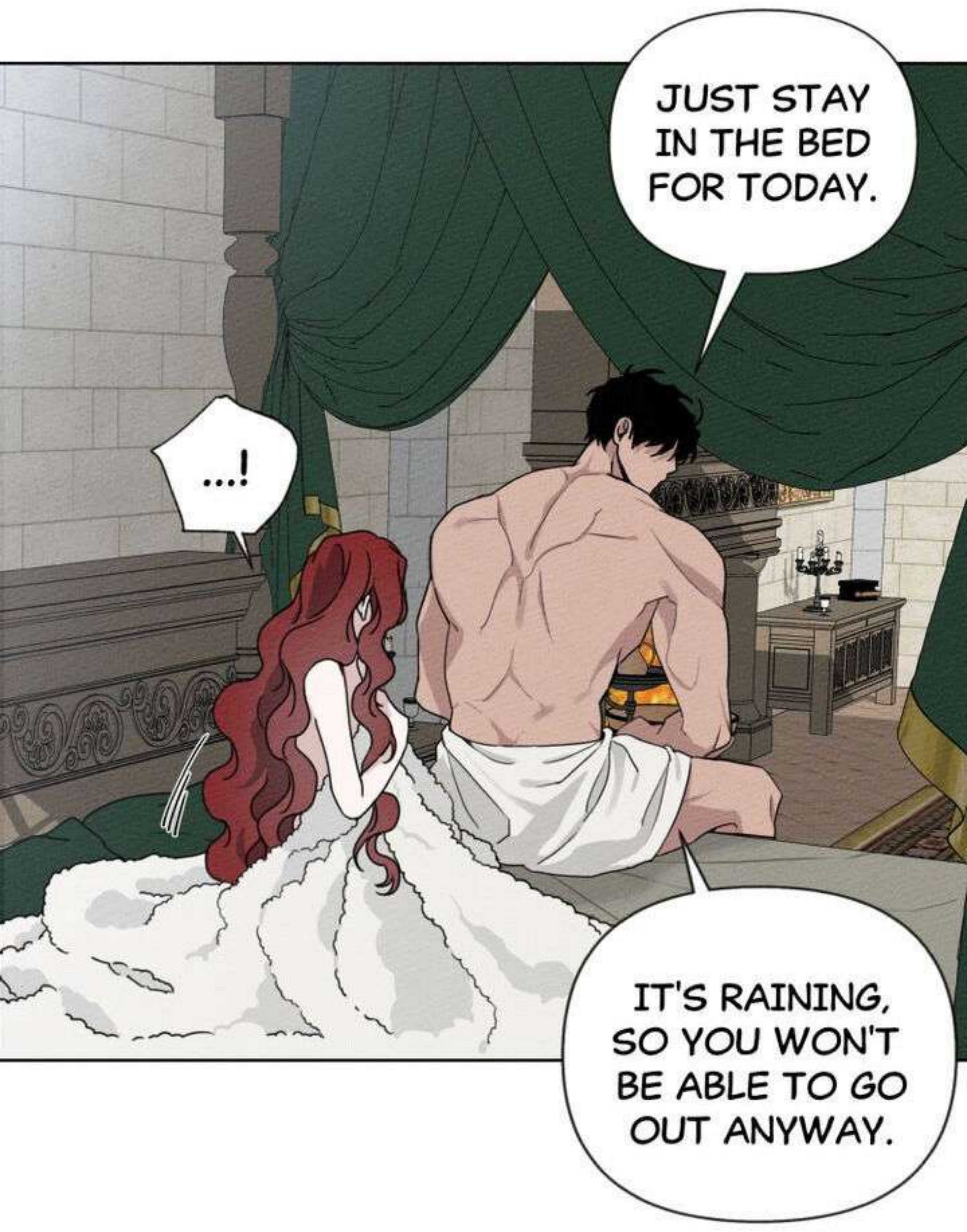
THAT THE COLOR WAS DREARY, AND IT STUCK OUT EVERYWHERE. THAT IT WAS UGLY.

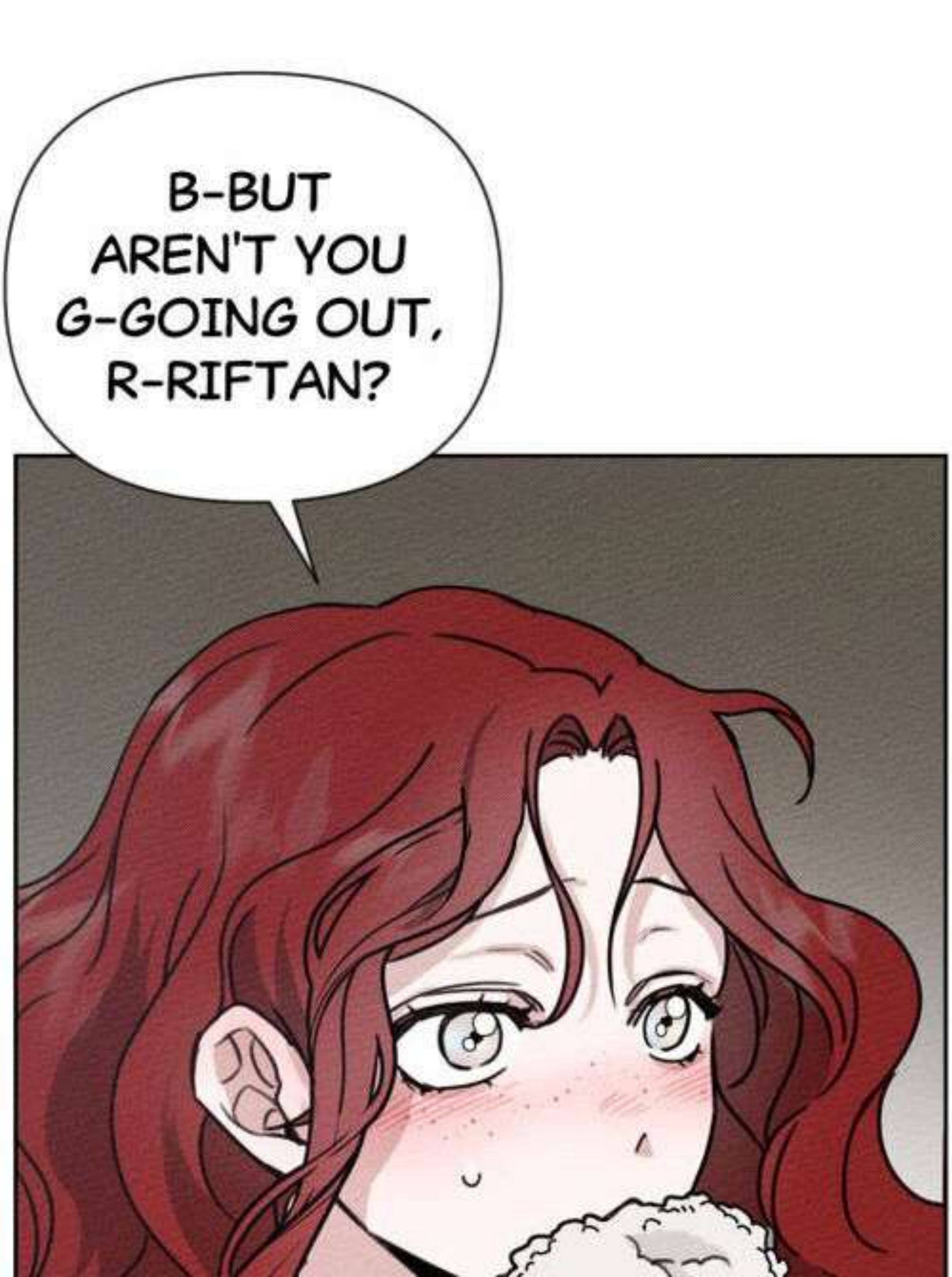

BUT YOUR CURLS ARE SO CUTE. I LOVE SEEING THEM FALL ACROSS YOUR SHOULDER, FEELING THEM ON MY SKIN.
NUZZLE

SO LEAVE YOUR HAIR DOWN WHEN YOU'RE


WHEN YOU'RE WITH ME.
...

WHAT A STRANGE MAN.
WHY DOES HE LIKE
SOMETHING SO UGLY?


JUST STAY IN THE BED FOR TODAY.
...!
IT'S RAINING, SO YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO GO OUT ANYWAY.

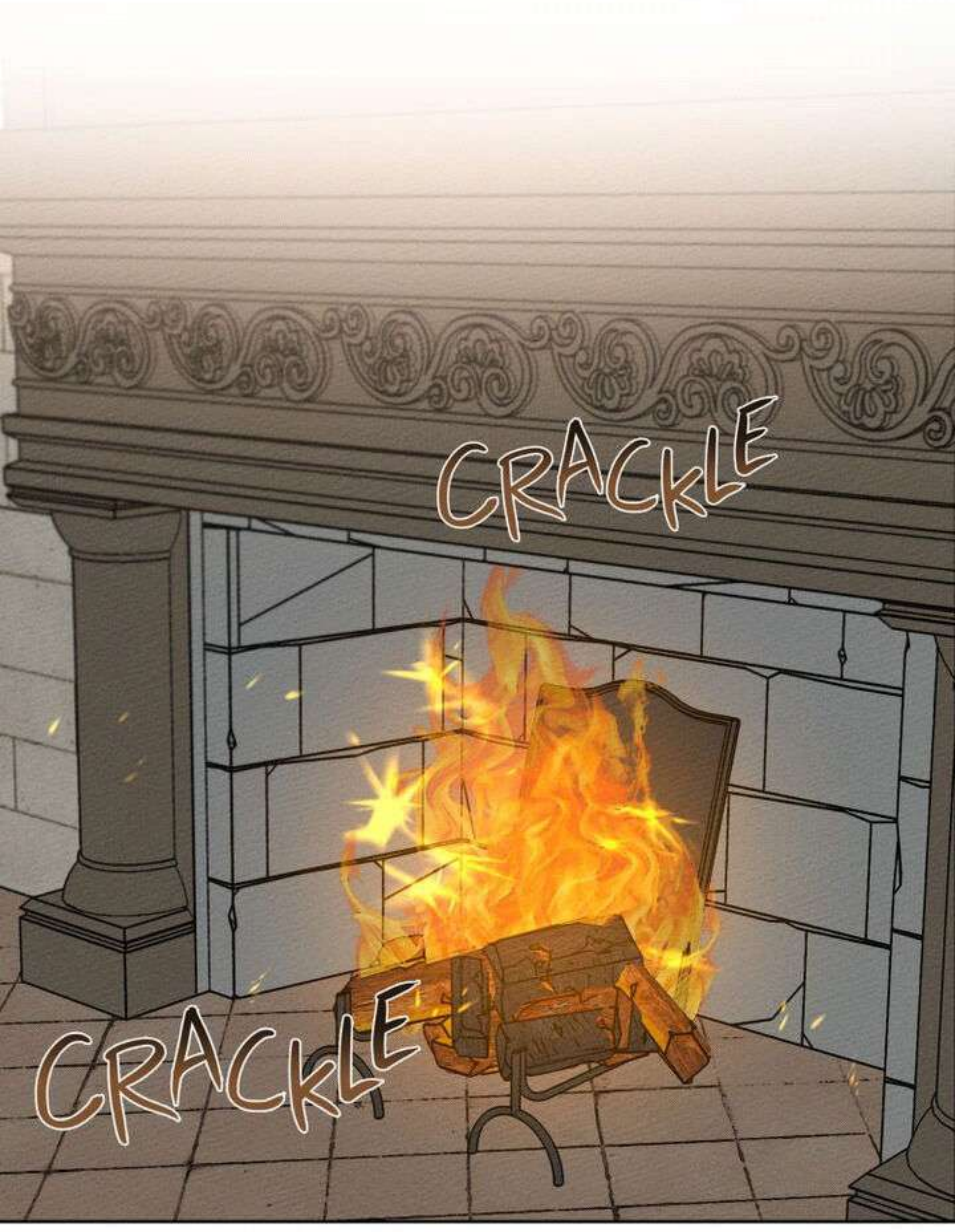

B-BUT AREN'T YOU G-GOING OUT, R-RIFTAN?

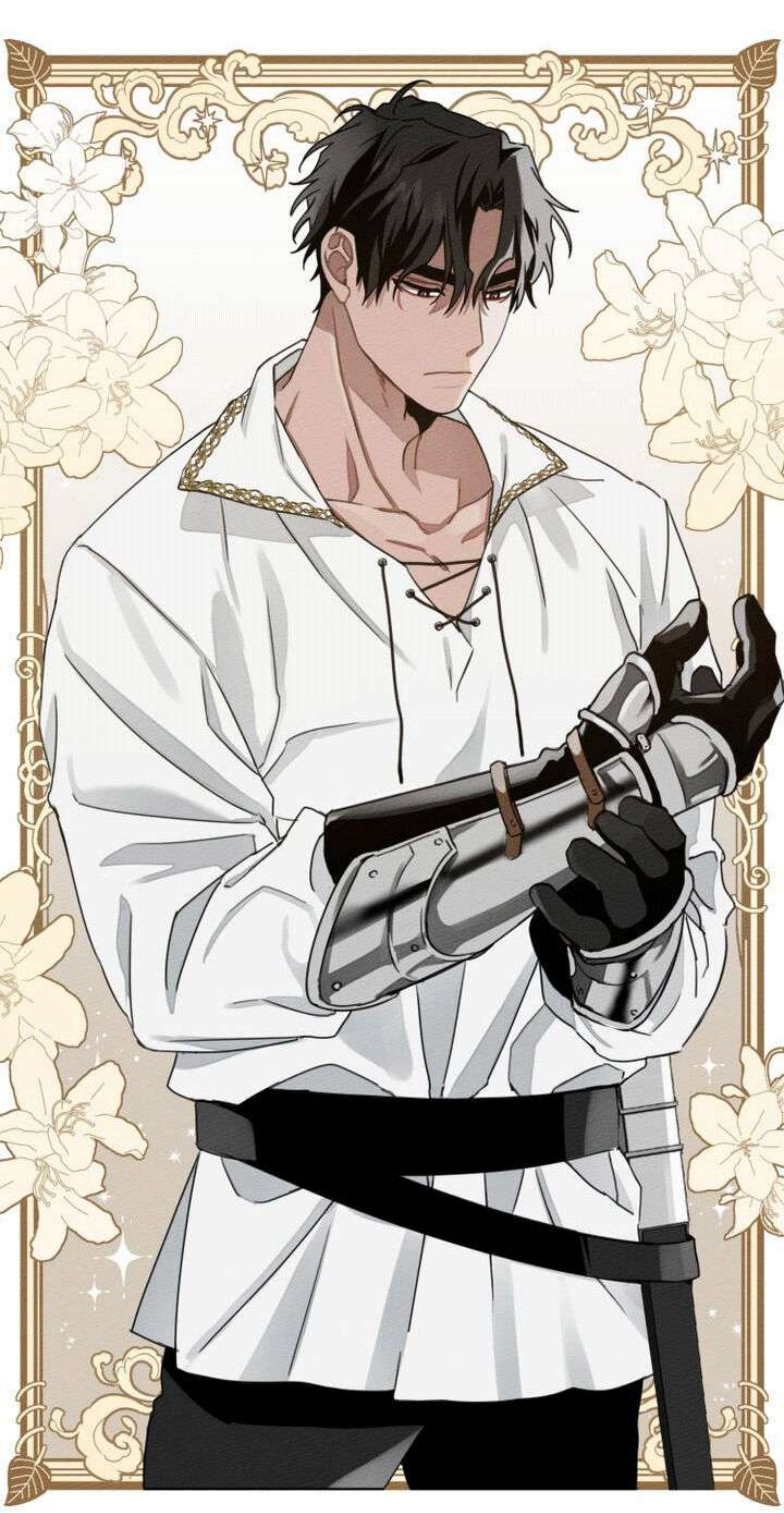
I'LL B-BE FINE, T-TOO.

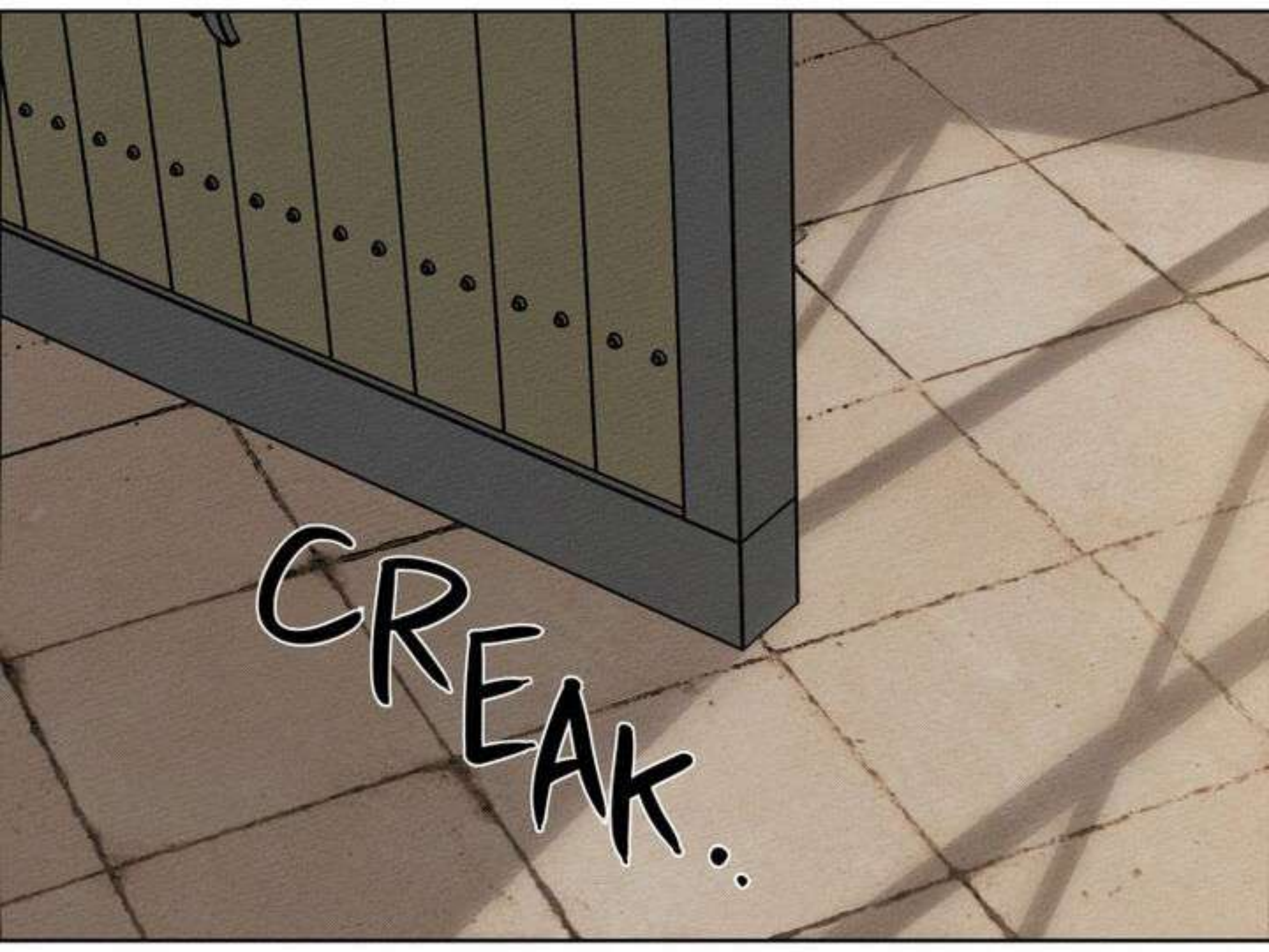
NO. YOU MUST BE TIRED, AND...

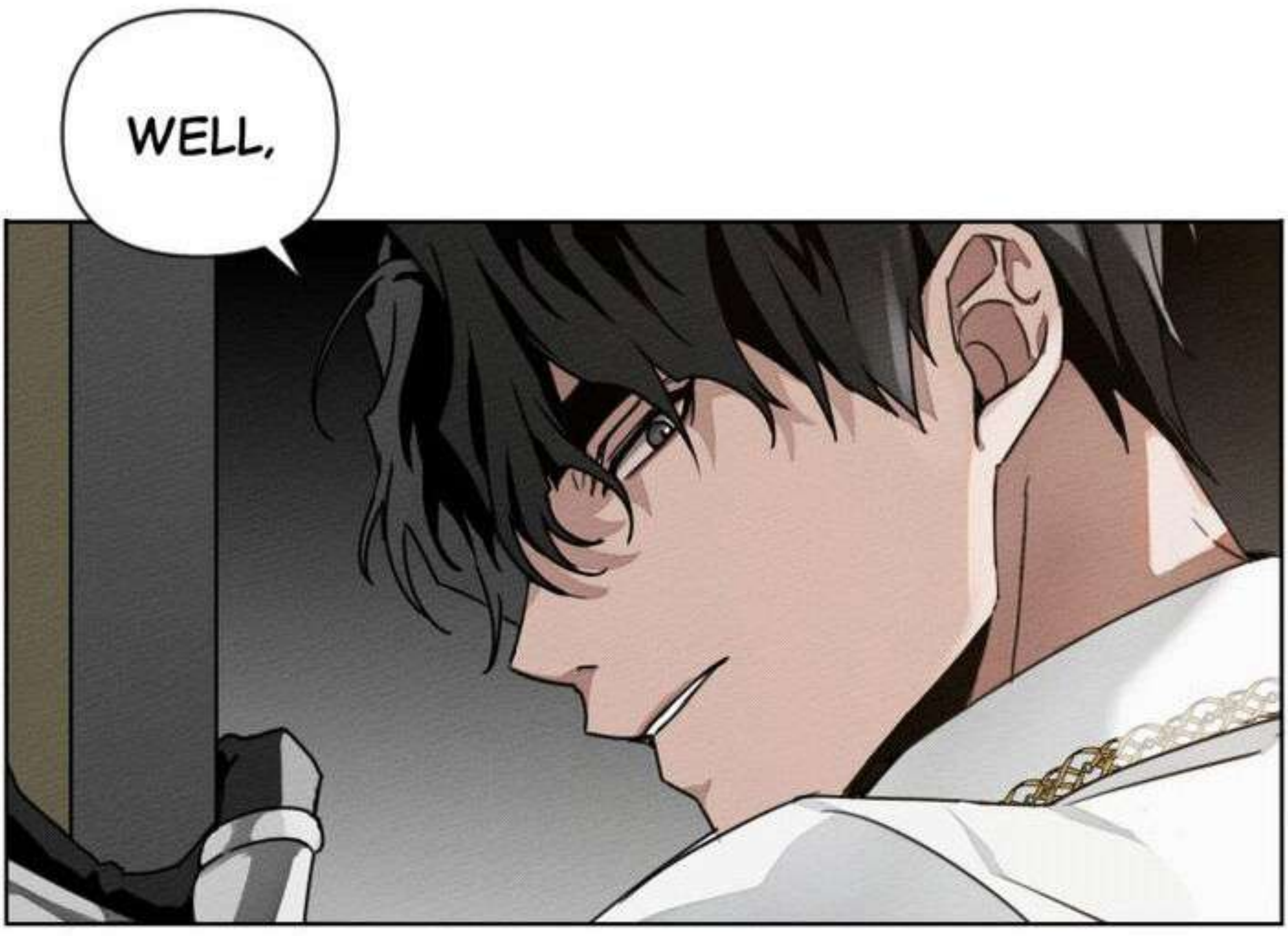
YOU SAID...
YOU WERE SORE...
BLUSH..!

B-BUT TH- THAT'S—!
HNG
COVER


CRACKLE
CRACKLE




CREAK..


WELL,

I'LL SEE YOU LATER.

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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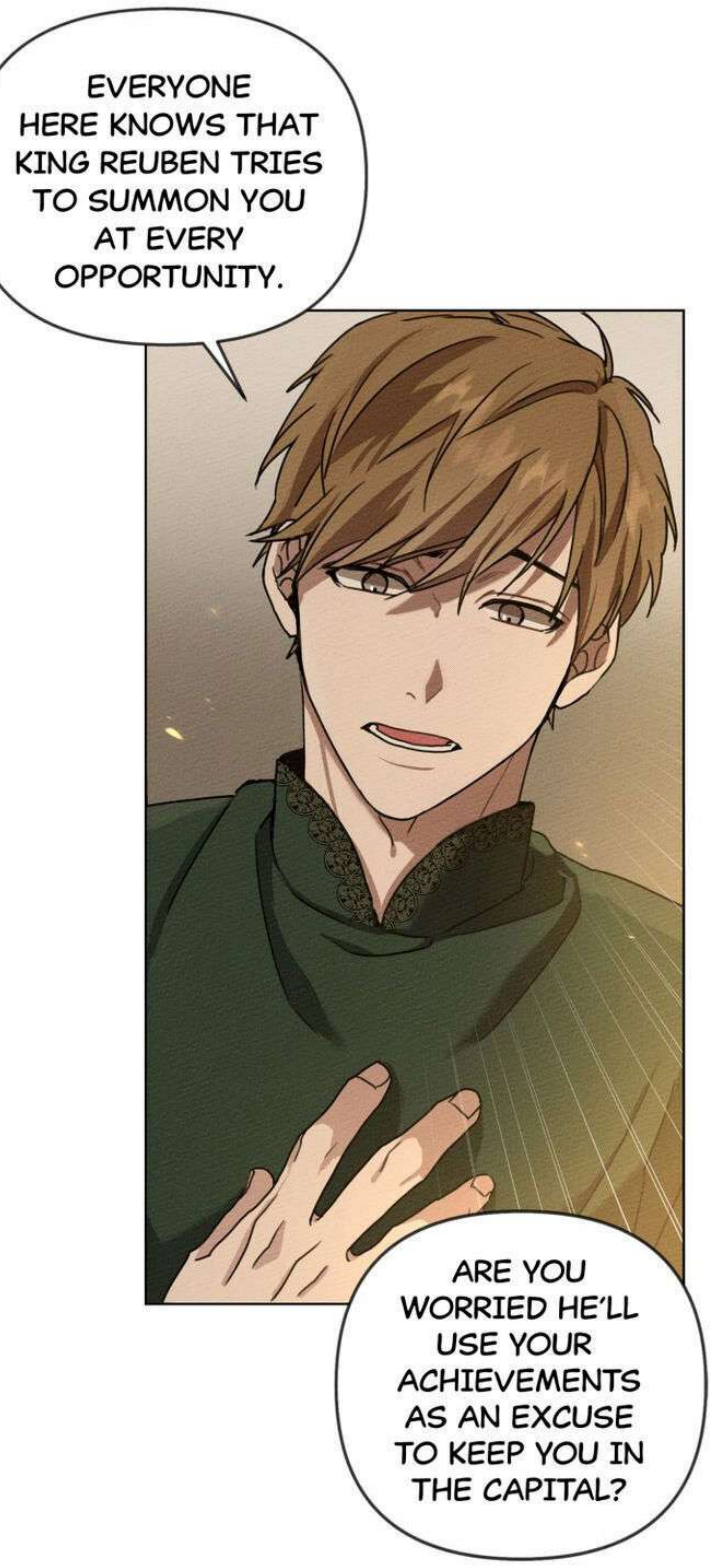
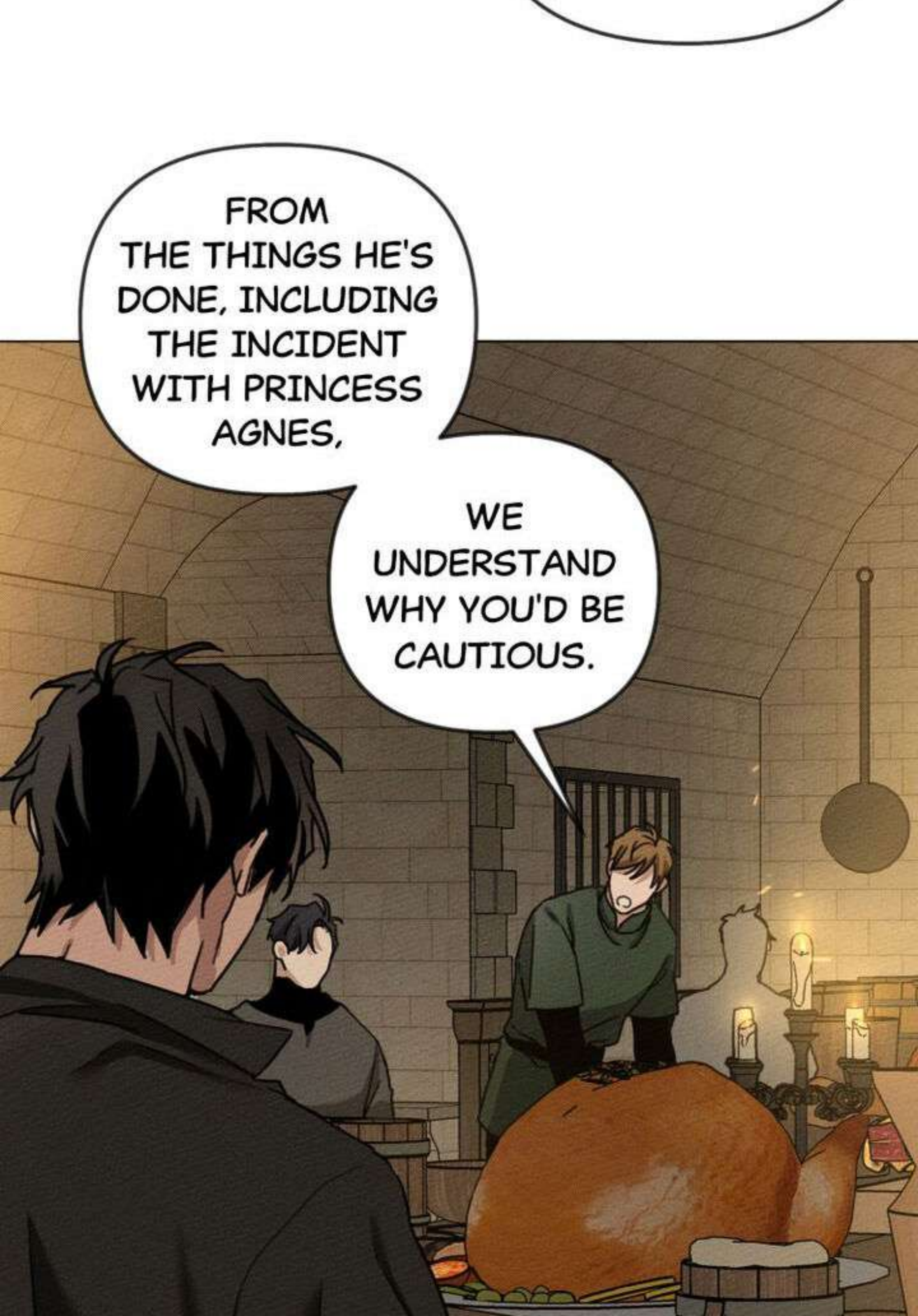
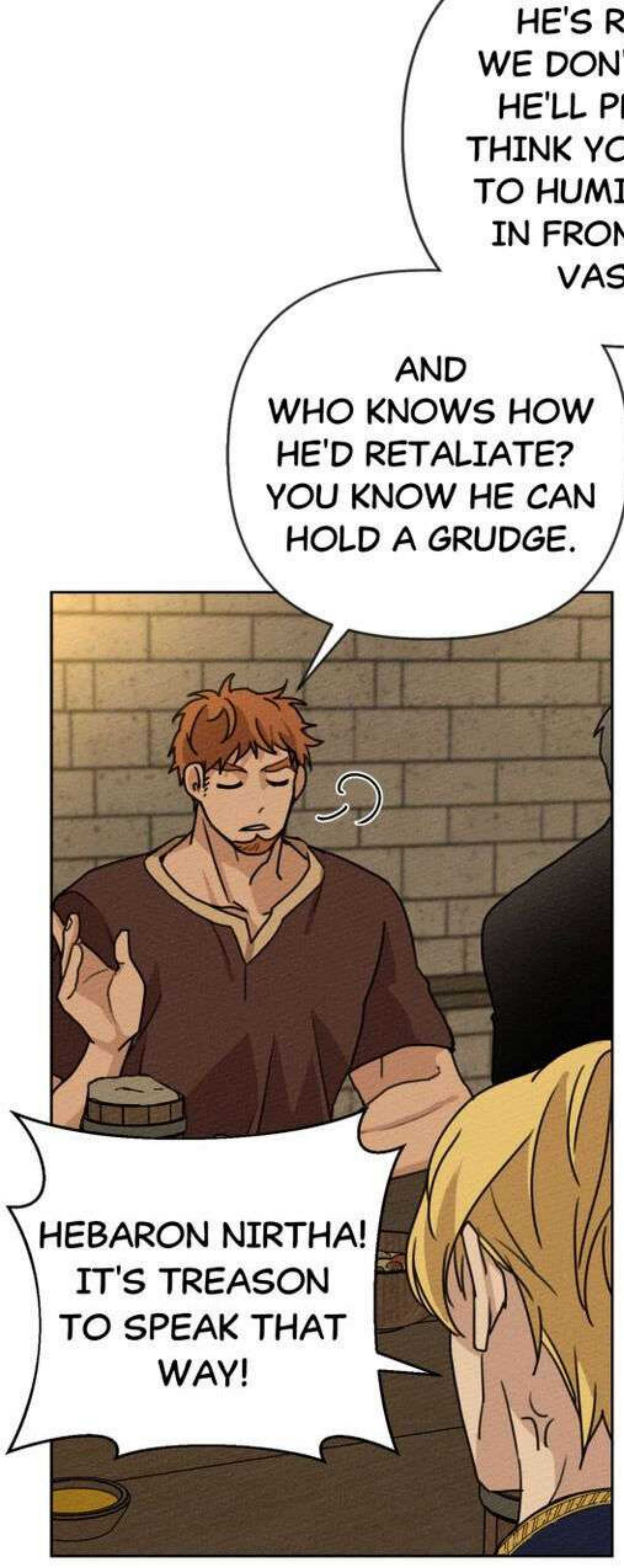
WATCH YOUR MOUTH, ELLIOT.


EVERYONE HERE KNOWS THAT KING REUBEN TRIES TO SUMMON YOU AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY.
ARE YOU WORRIED HE'LL USE YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS AS AN EXCUSE TO KEEP YOU IN THE CAPITAL?

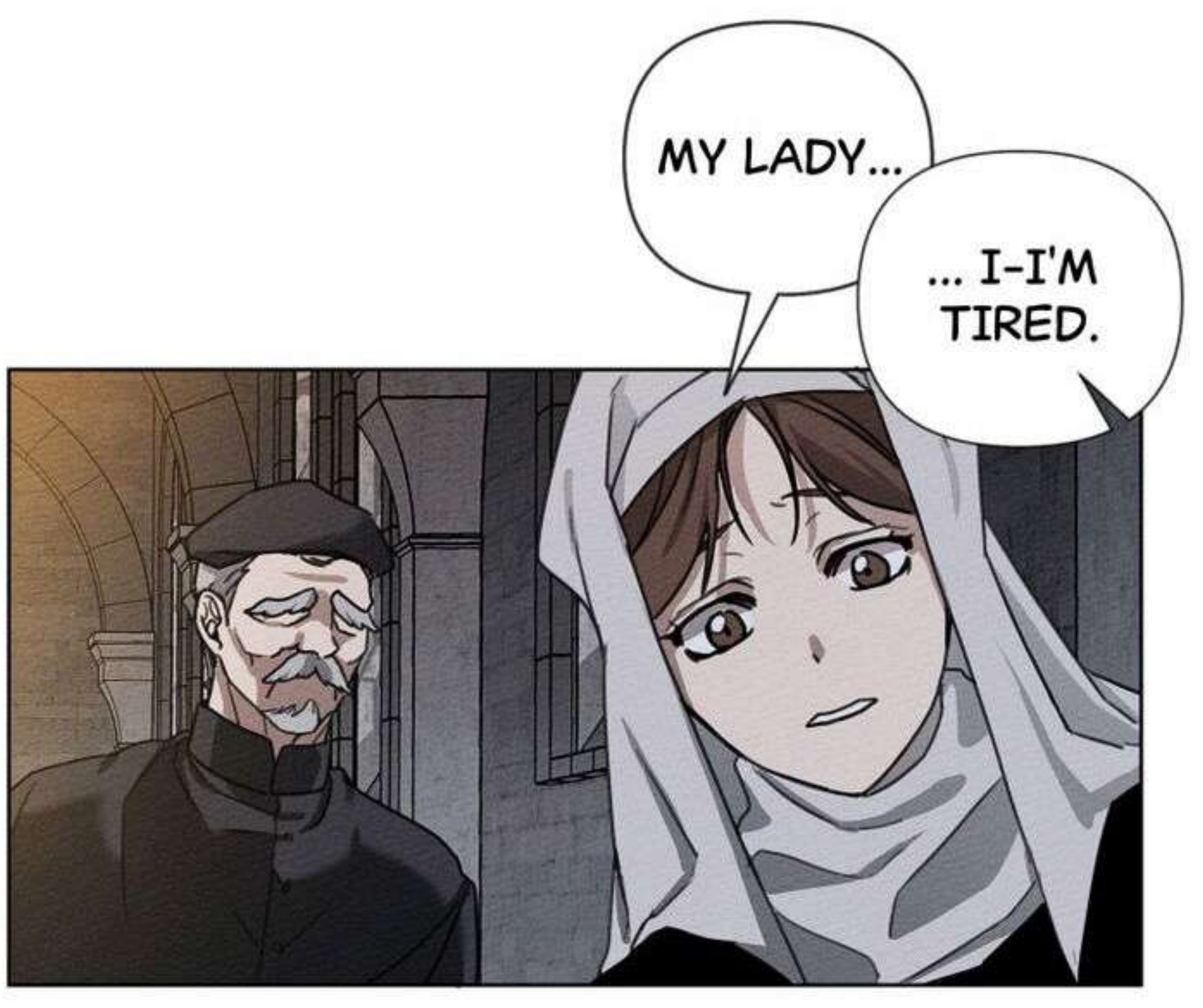

FROM THE THINGS HE'S DONE, INCLUDING THE INCIDENT WITH PRINCESS AGNES,
WE UNDERSTAND WHY YOU'D BE CAUTIOUS.

BUT GOING TOO FAR WILL ONLY ANTAGONIZE HIM.
AFTER ALL, HE'S ALWAYS BEEN WARY OF THE NOBLES.

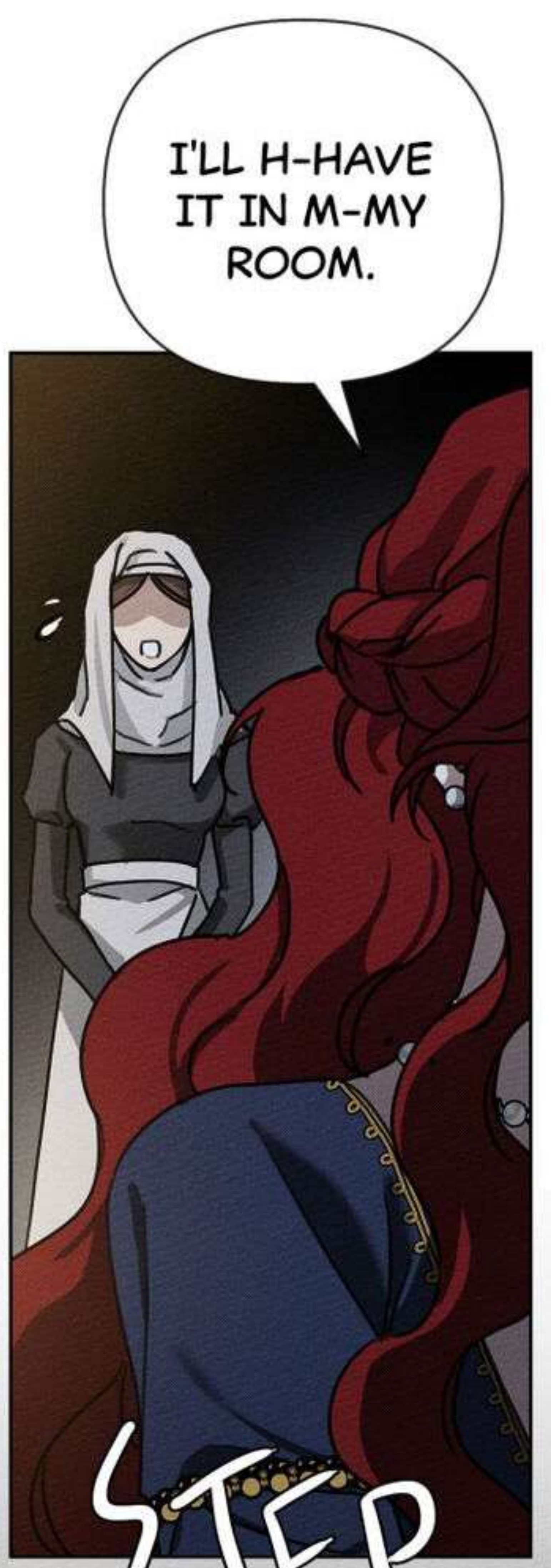

HE'S RIGHT. IF WE DON'T ATTEND, HE'LL PROBABLY THINK YOU WANTED TO HUMILIATE HIM IN FRONT OF HIS VASSALS.
AND WHO KNOWS HOW HE'D RETALIATE? YOU KNOW HE CAN HOLD A GRUDGE.
HEBARON NIRTHA! IT'S TREASON TO SPEAK THAT WAY!

QUIET. DID I SAY WE WEREN'T GOING? WE'LL GO ONCE THE RAIN STOPS.
SIR!
IF WE HAD JUST GONE STRAIGHT TO THE CAPITAL INSTEAD...!

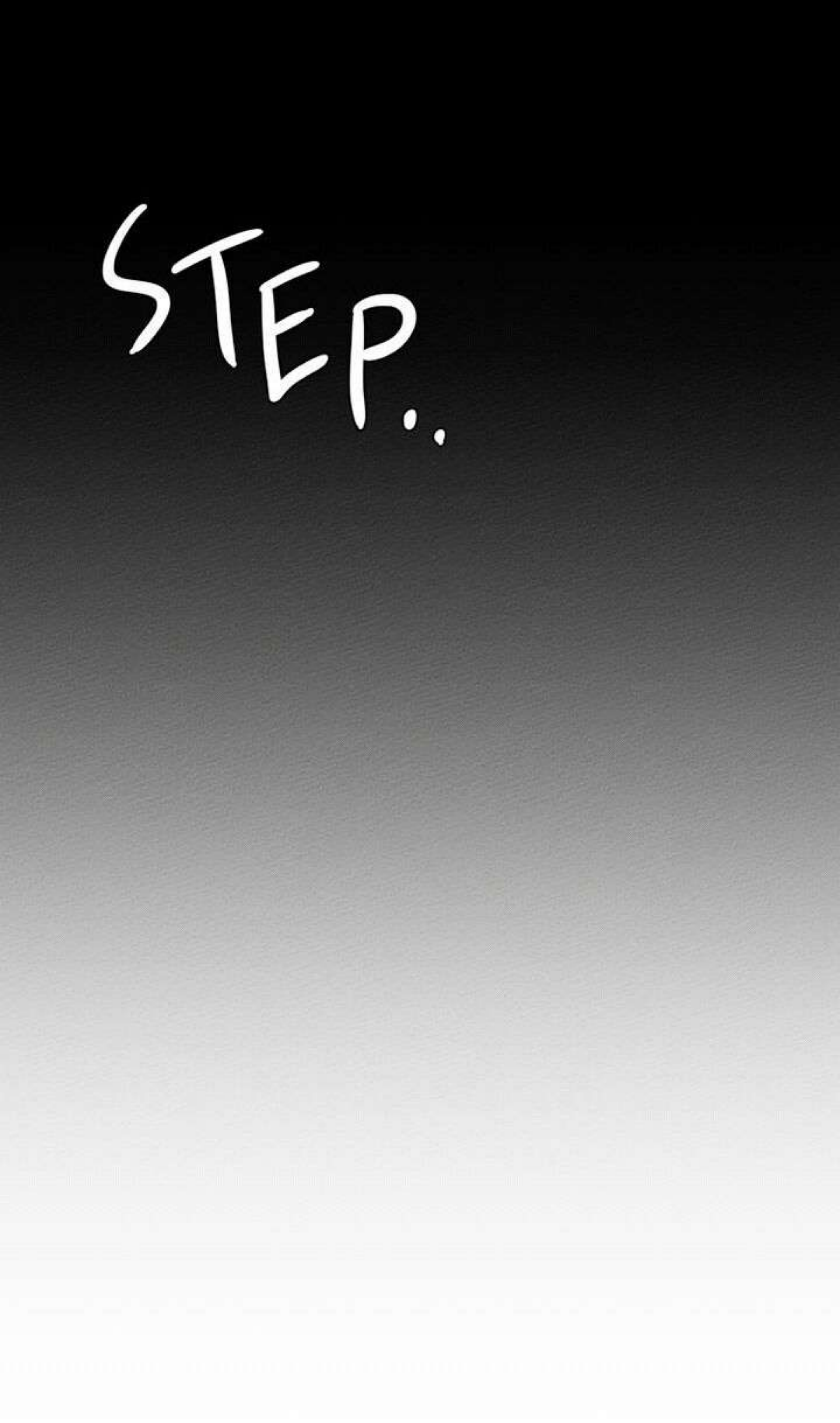
IT'S MY FAULT...


MY LADY...
... I-I'M TIRED.

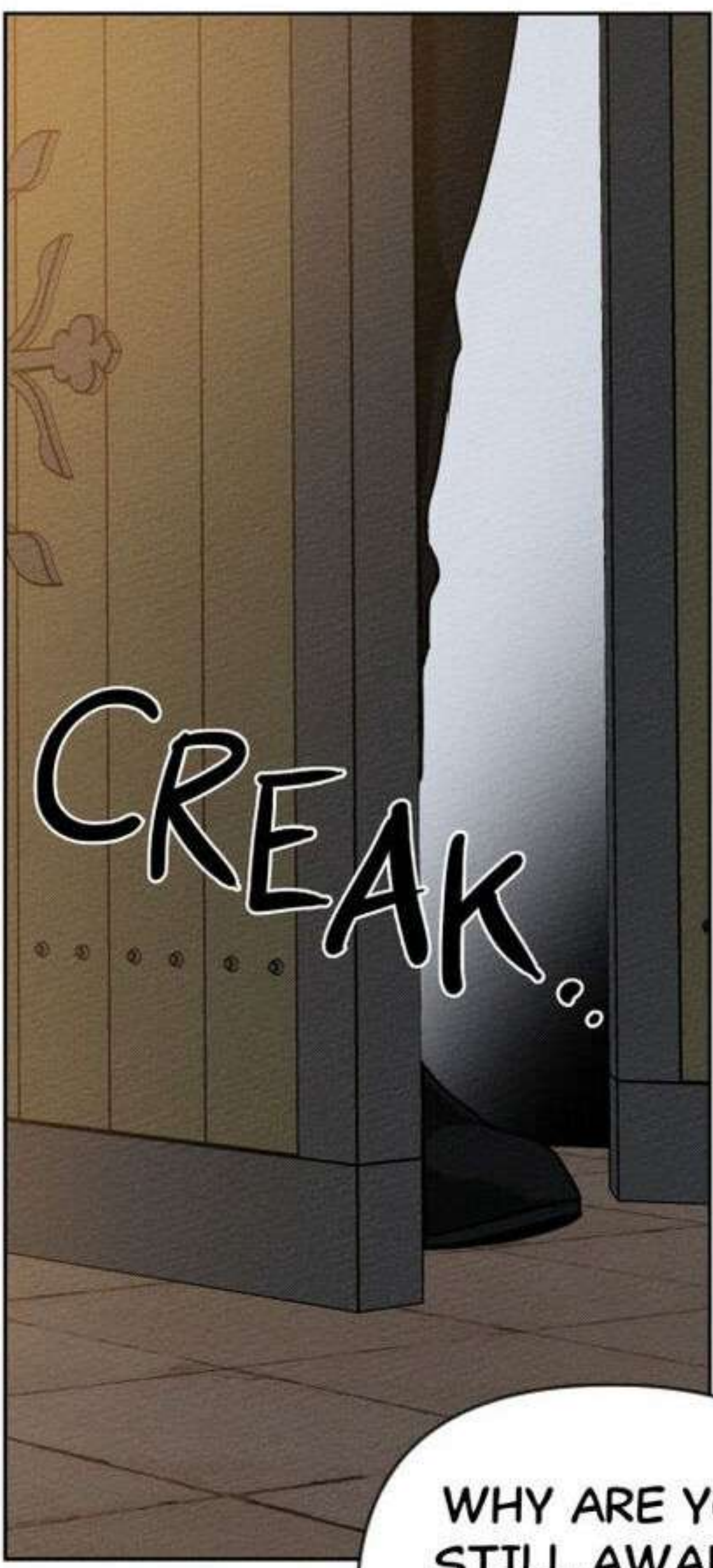
WHAT ABOUT DINNER, MY LADY?
STEP

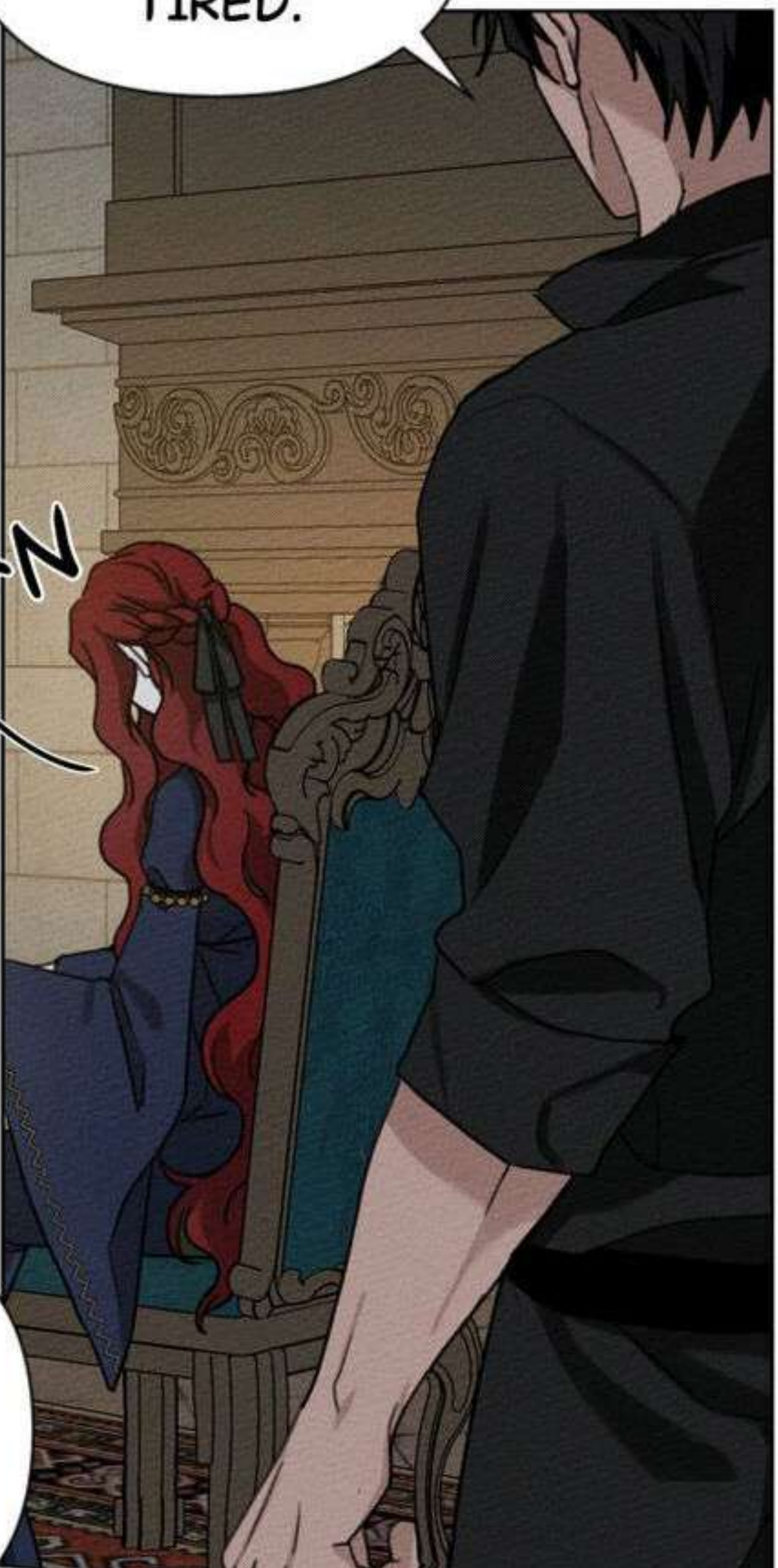

I'LL H-HAVE IT IN M-MY ROOM.
STEP

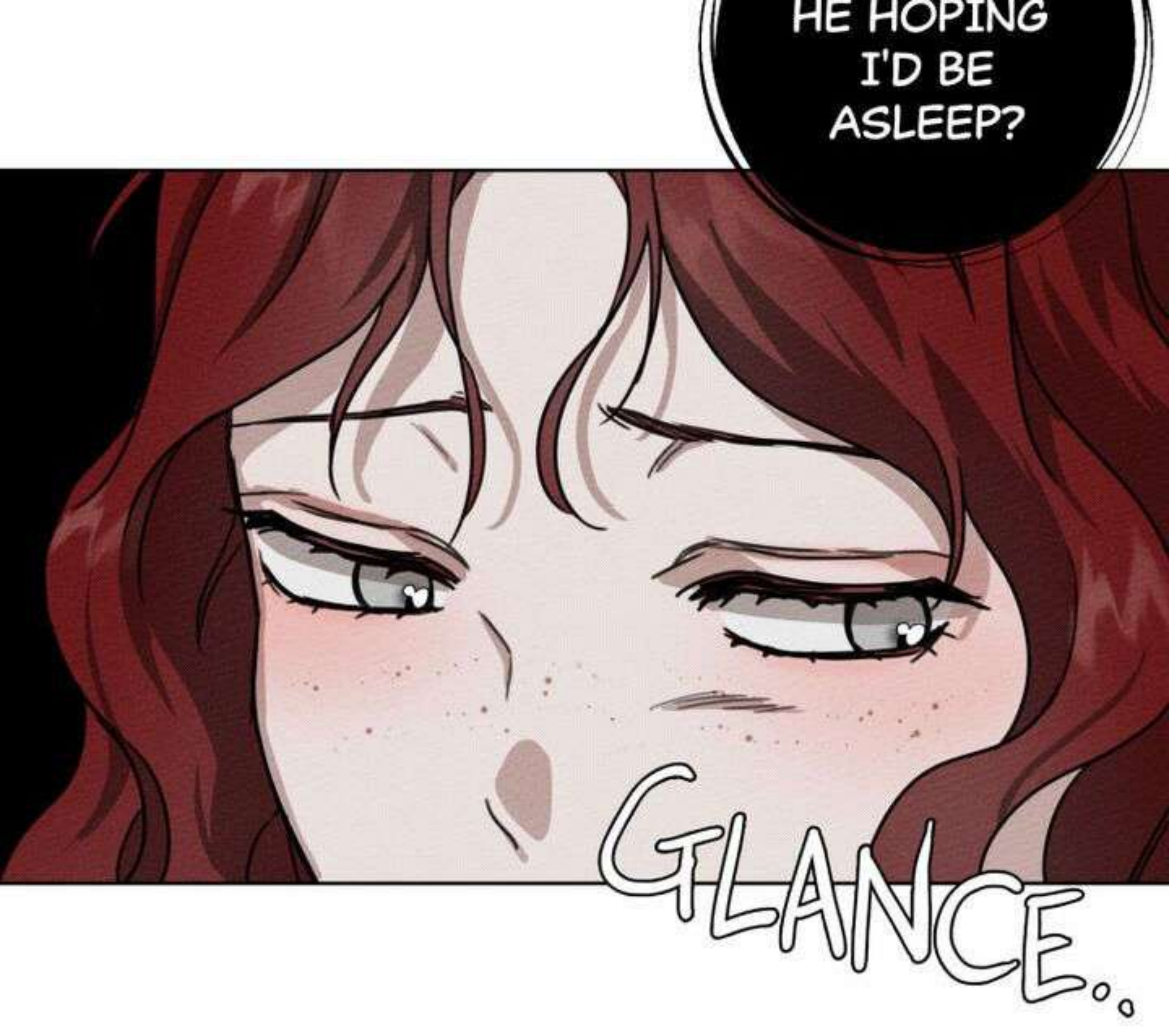
MY LADY!
STEP
STEP

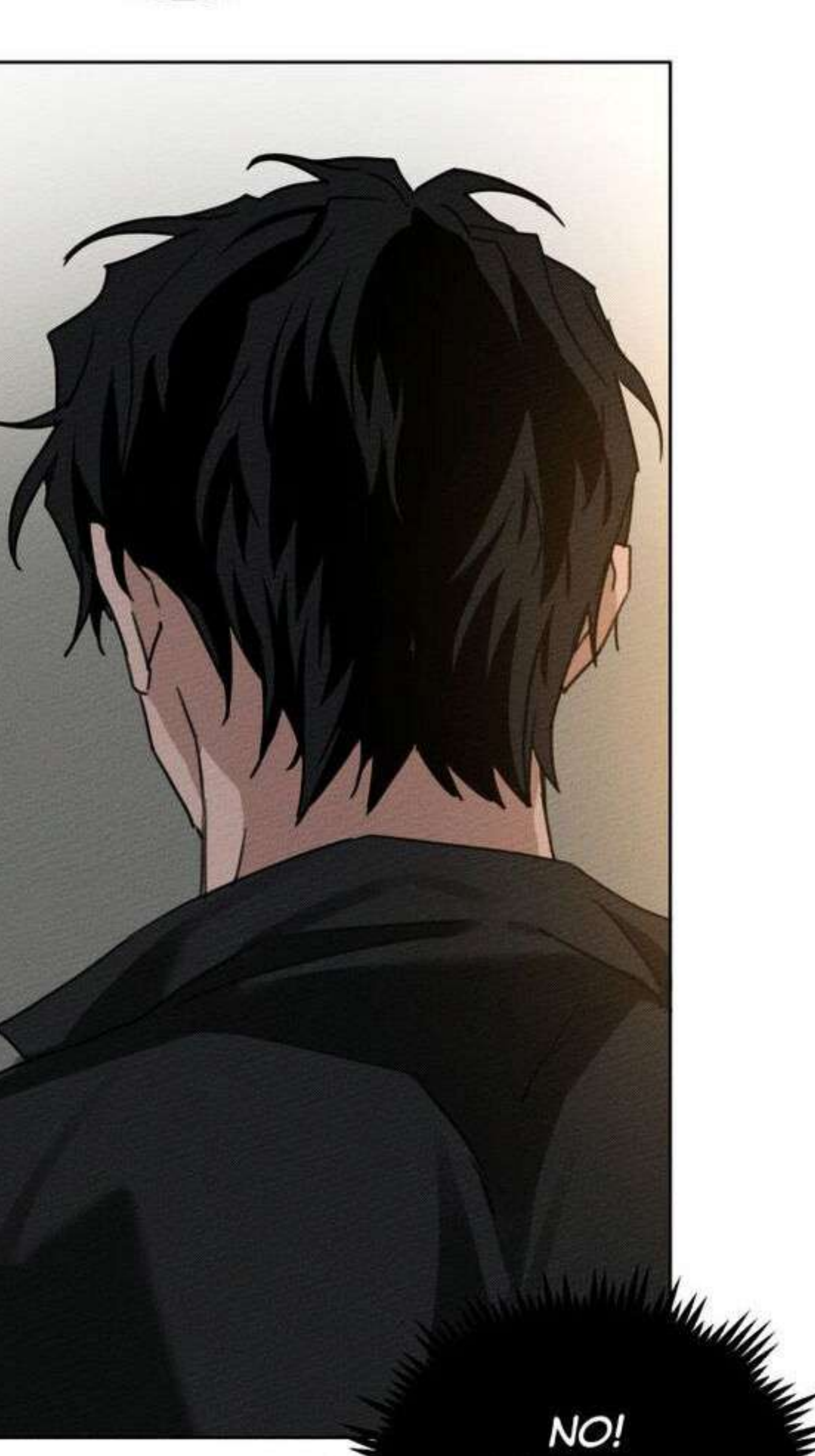

STEP..

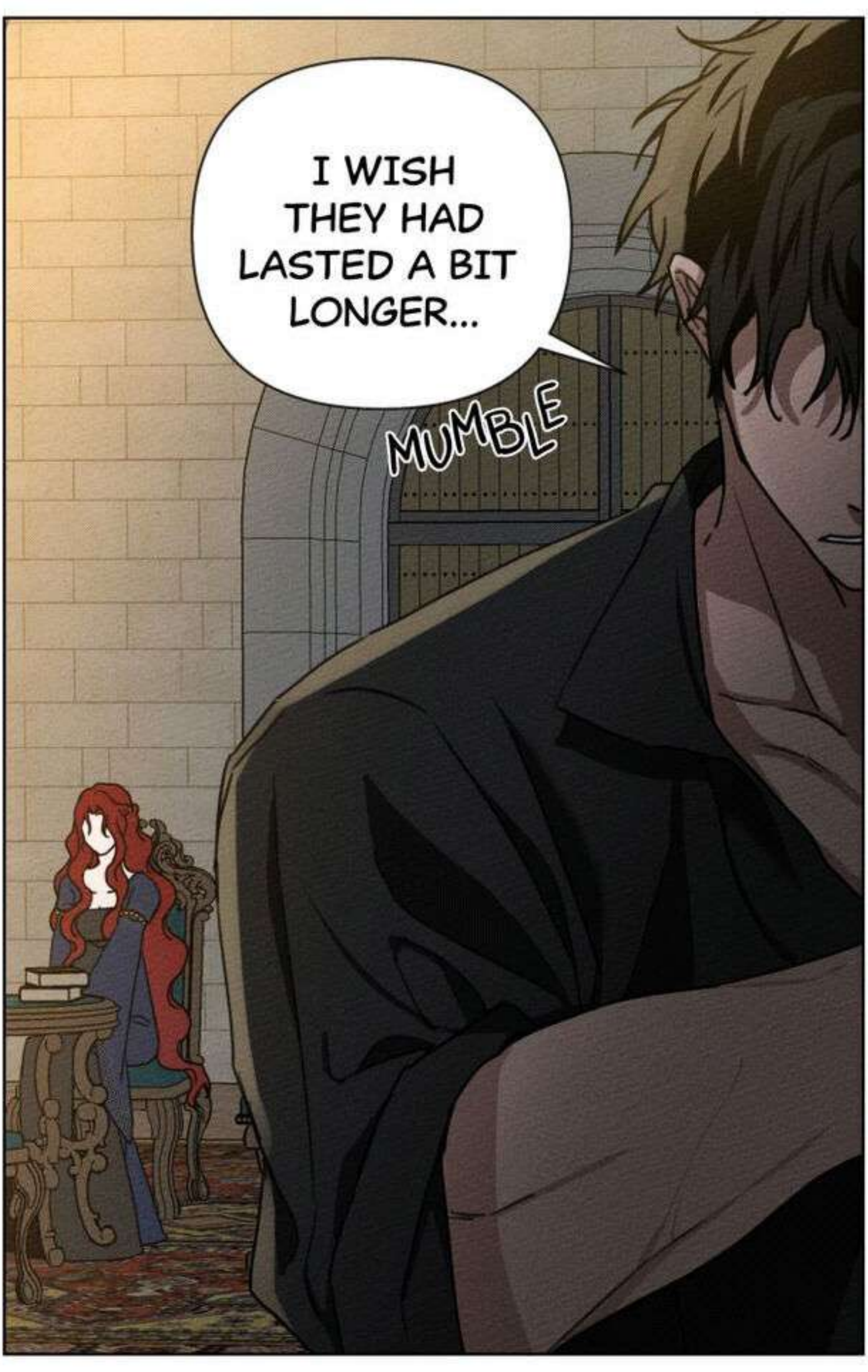
RIFTAN NEEDS TO LEAVE IN THREE DAYS...
TAP

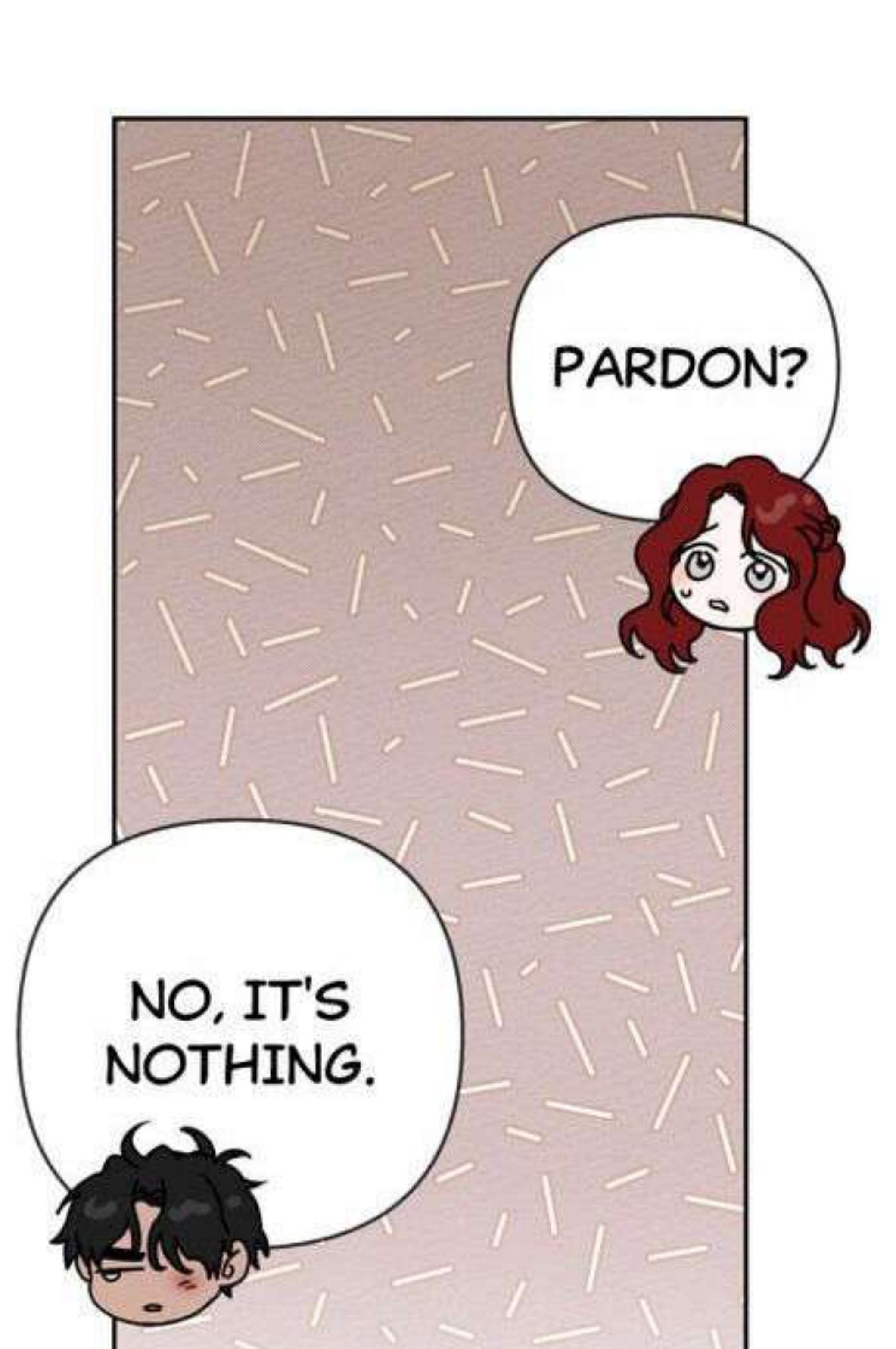

CREAK...
WHY ARE YOU STILL AWAKE? THE MAID SAID YOU WERE TIRED.

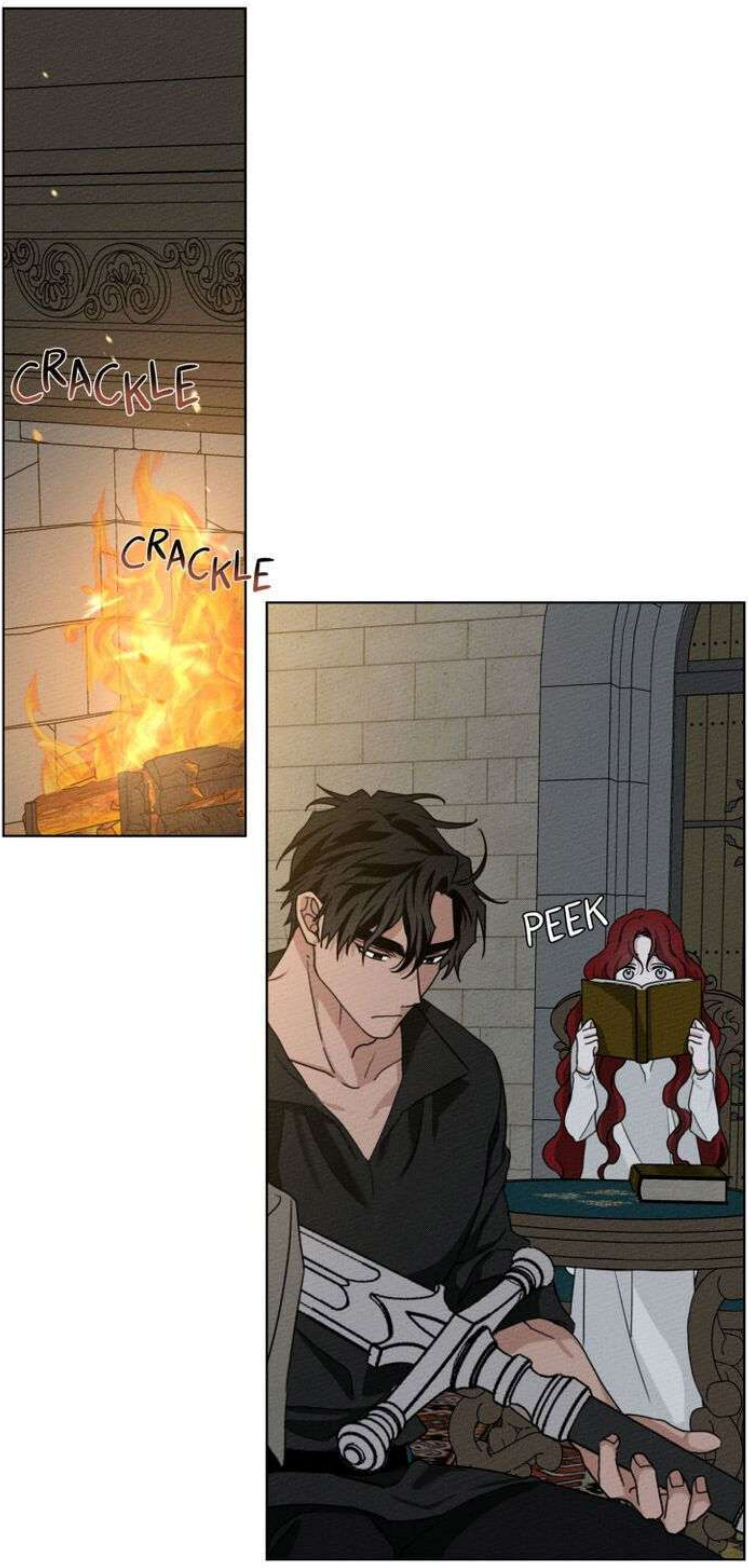

TURN
I-I'M FINE. Y-YOU MUST B-BE THE ONE WHO'S T-TIRED.
YOU'VE B-BEEN OUT SINCE D-DAWN...
WAS

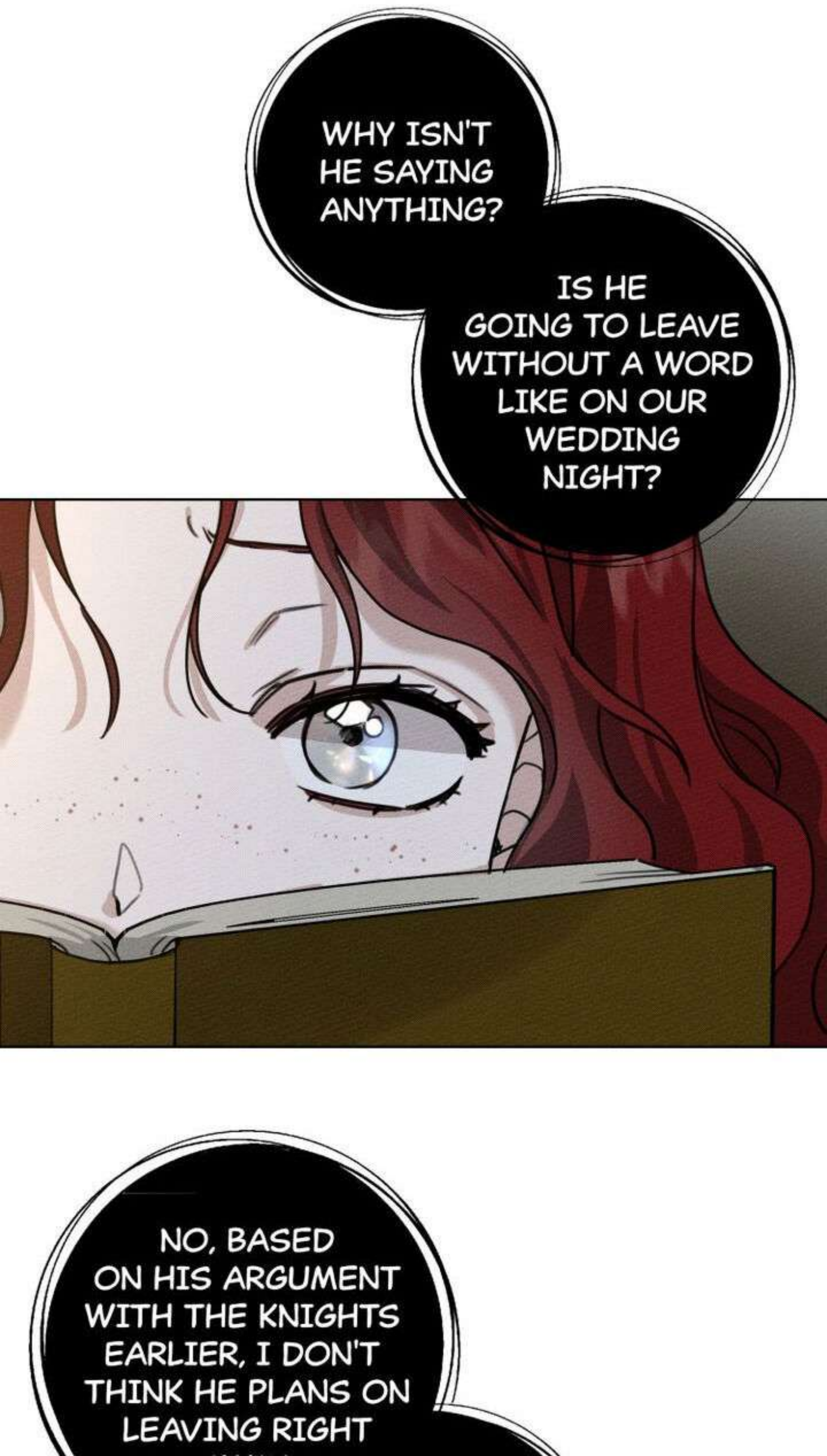

HE HOPING
I'D BE
ASLEEP?
GLANCE..
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE HAD A PROPER CONVERSATION, AND WE BARELY SEE EACH OTHER NOW.

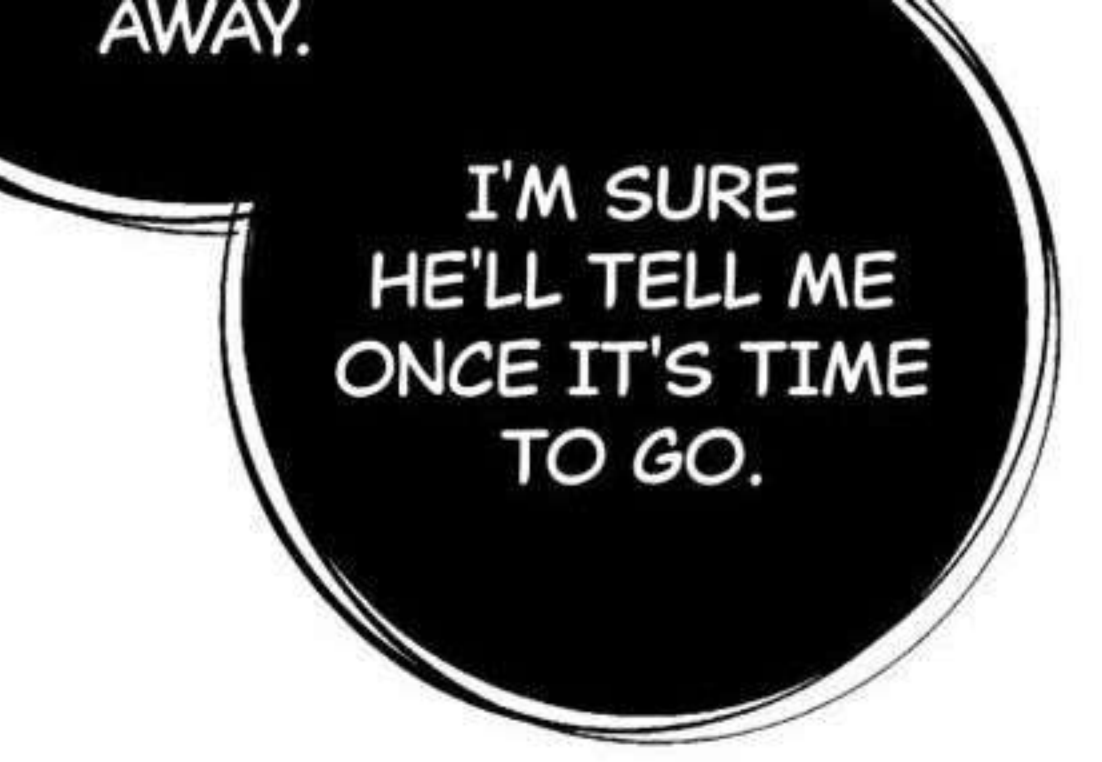

NO! WHY AM I BEING SO NEGATIVE?
S-STILL, I'M G-GLAD THE RAINS HAVE S-STOPPED TODAY...

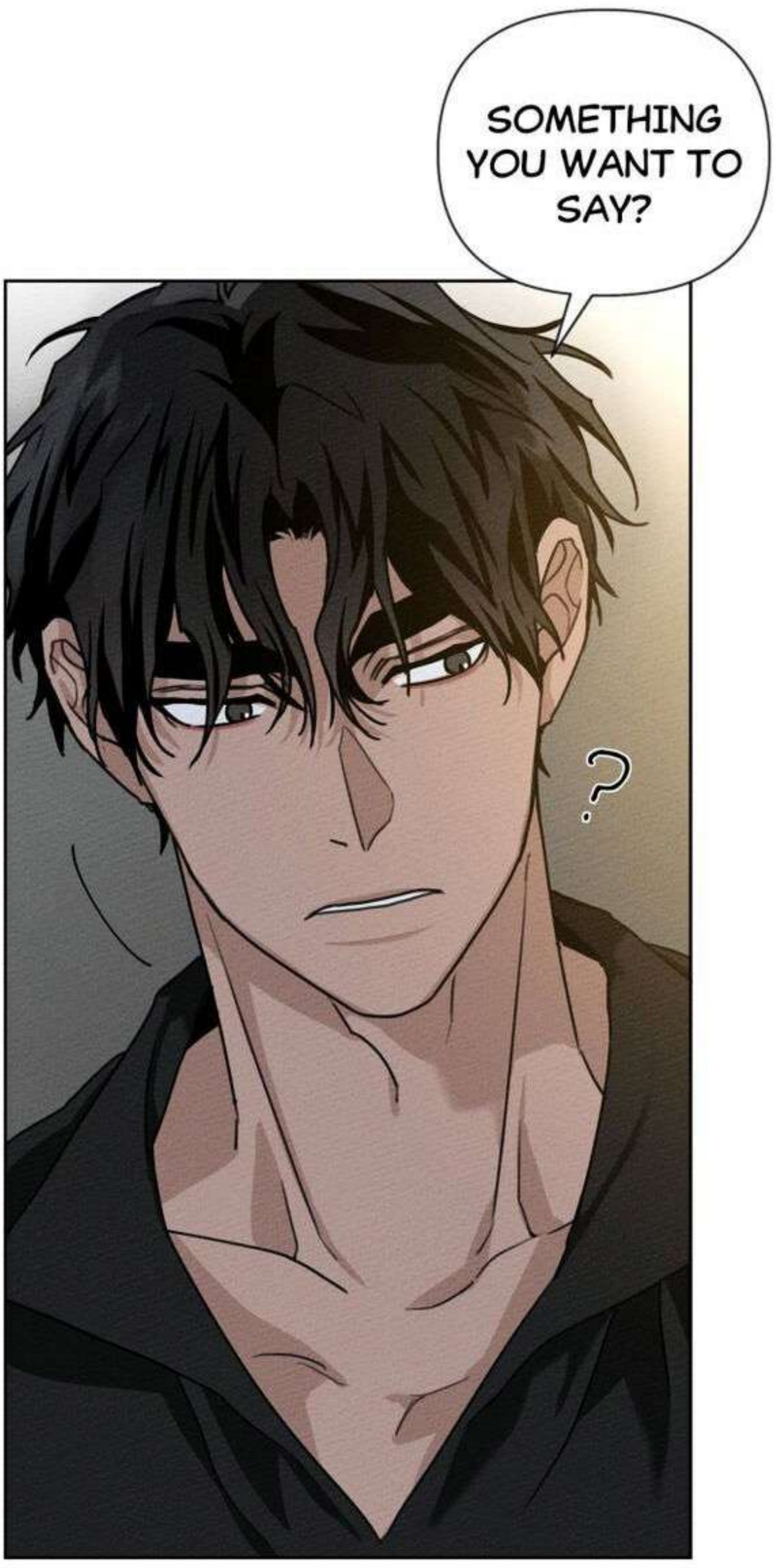

I WISH THEY HAD LASTED A BIT LONGER...
MUMBLE

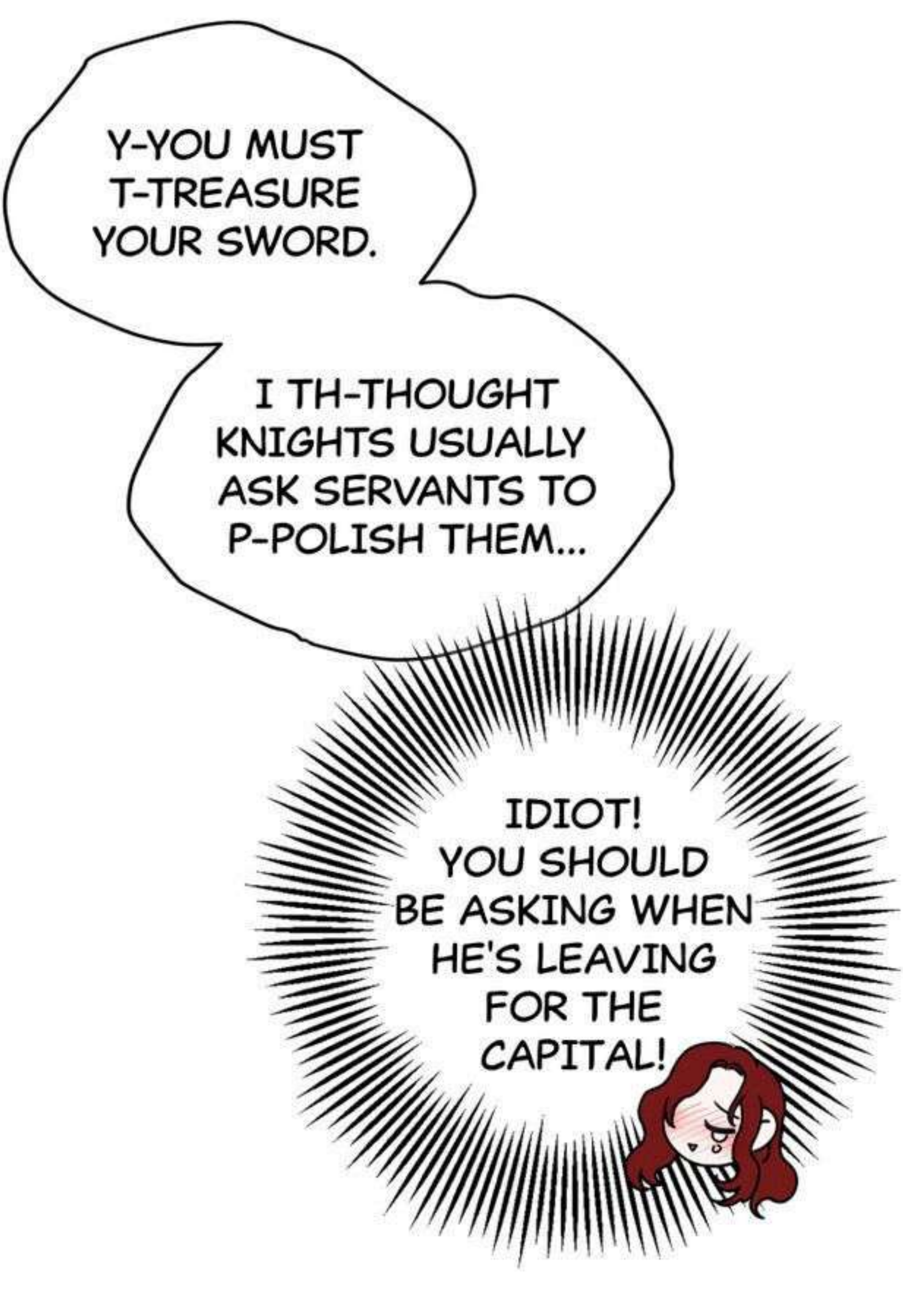

PARDON?
NO, IT'S NOTHING.

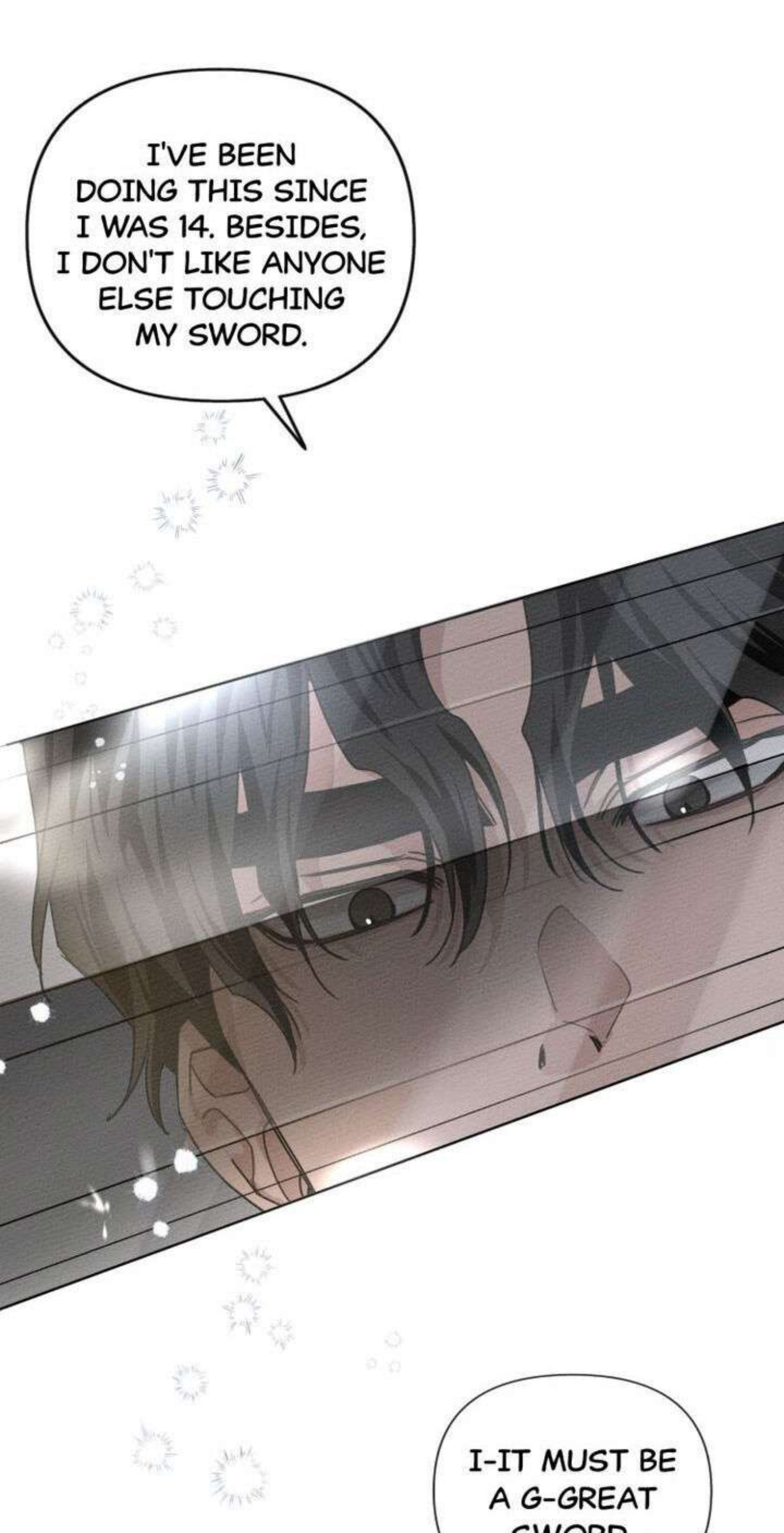

CRACKLE
CRACKLE
PEEK


WHY ISN'T HE SAYING ANYTHING?
IS HE GOING TO LEAVE WITHOUT A WORD LIKE ON OUR WEDDING NIGHT?
NO, BASED ON HIS ARGUMENT WITH THE KNIGHTS EARLIER, I DON'T THINK HE PLANS ON LEAVING RIGHT

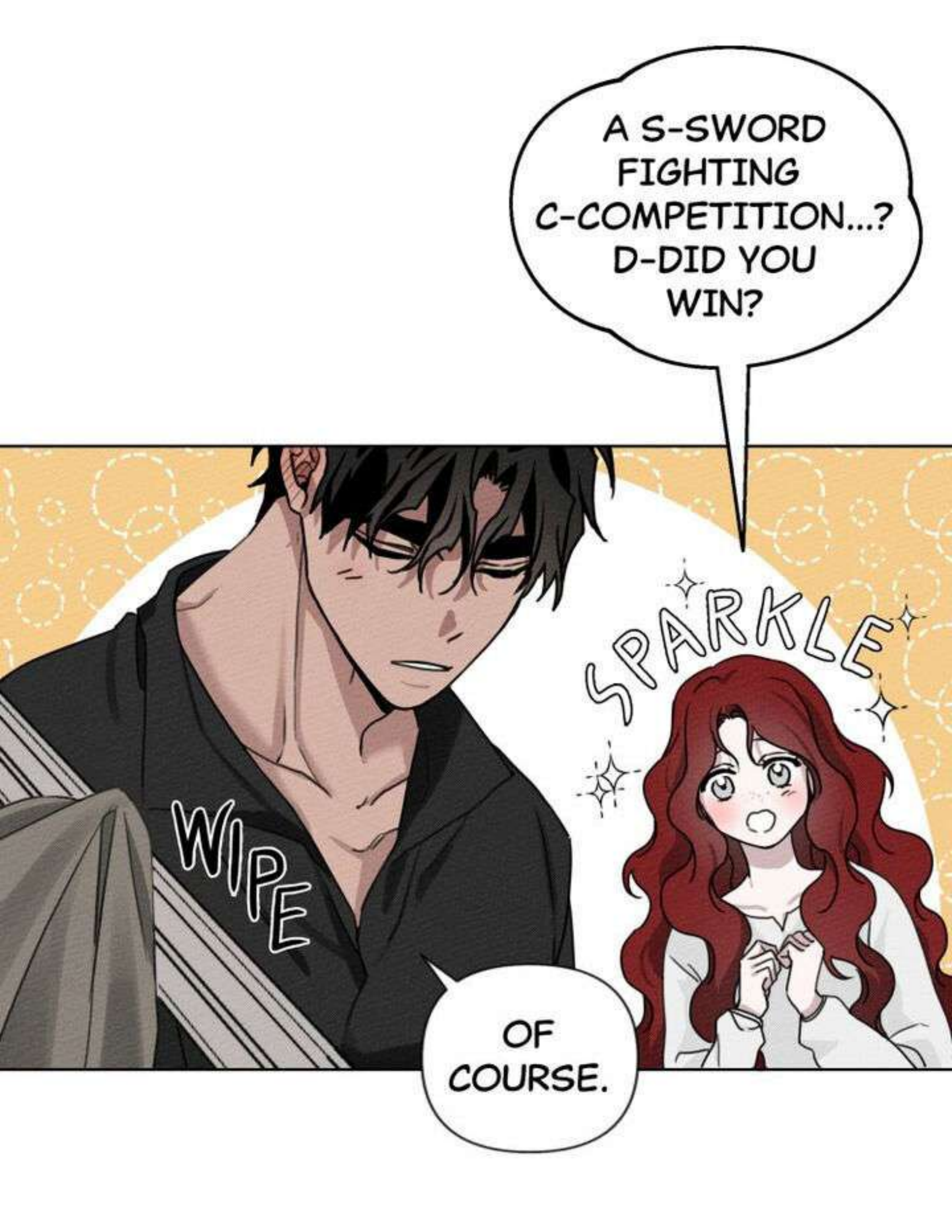

AWAY.
I'M SURE HE'LL TELL ME ONCE IT'S TIME TO GO.


SOMETHING YOU WANT TO SAY?
?


Y-YOU MUST T-TREASURE YOUR SWORD.
I TH-THOUGHT KNIGHTS USUALLY ASK SERVANTS TO P-POLISH THEM...
IDIOT! YOU SHOULD BE ASKING WHEN HE'S LEAVING FOR THE CAPITAL!


I'VE BEEN DOING THIS SINCE I WAS 14. BESIDES, I DON'T LIKE ANYONE ELSE TOUCHING MY SWORD.
I-IT MUST BE A G-GREAT SWORD.

IT'S ONE OF THE BEST IN ALL THE SEVEN KINGDOMS.
I GOT THIS IN MY FIRST SWORD FIGHTING COMPETITION.

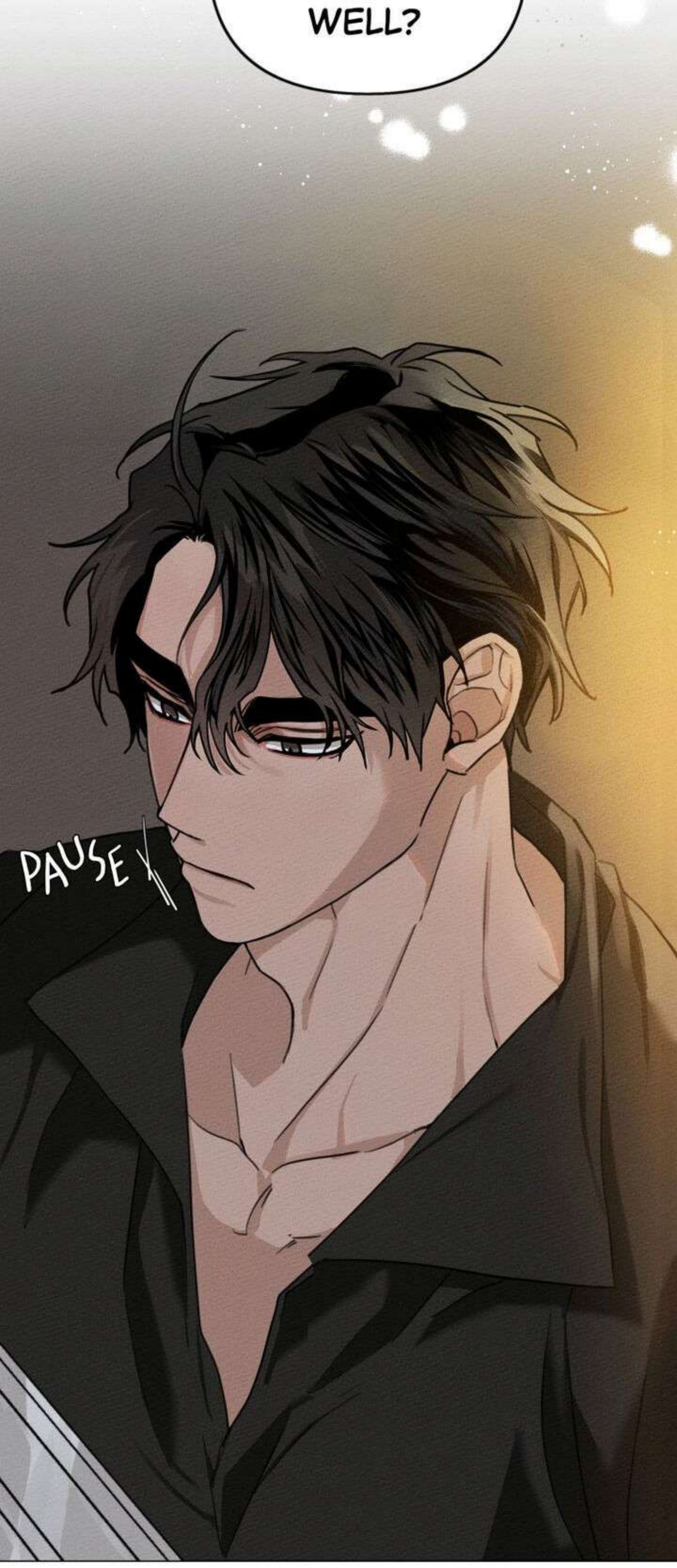

A S-SWORD FIGHTING C-COMPETITION...? D-DID YOU WIN?
SPARKLE
WIPE
OF COURSE.

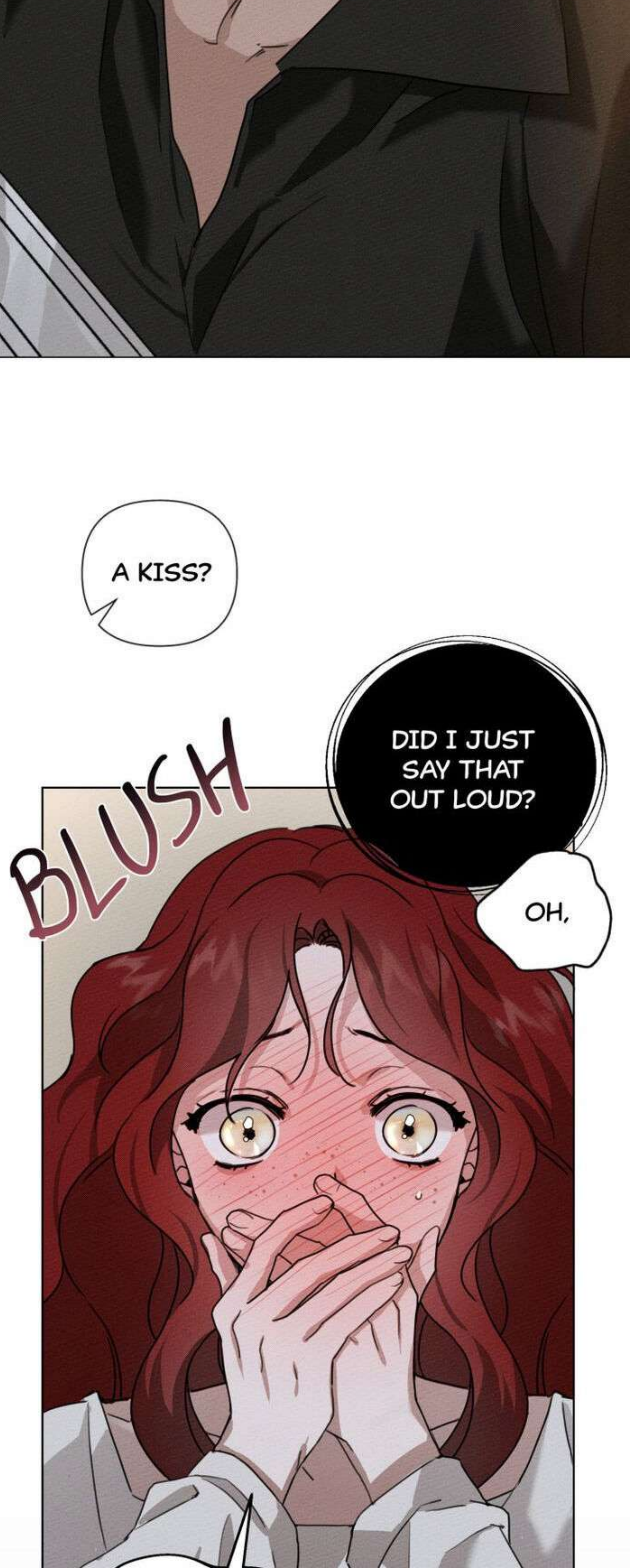
THE SWORD FIGHTING COMPETITIONS
THAT FATHER SOMETIMES BROUGHT ROSETTA TO

WERE THINGS I COULD ONLY READ ABOUT IN NOVELS.

ROSETTA WOULD COMPLAIN THAT THEY WERE LOUD, FILTHY, AND BARBARIC EVENTS,
BUT STILL I ENVIED HER.

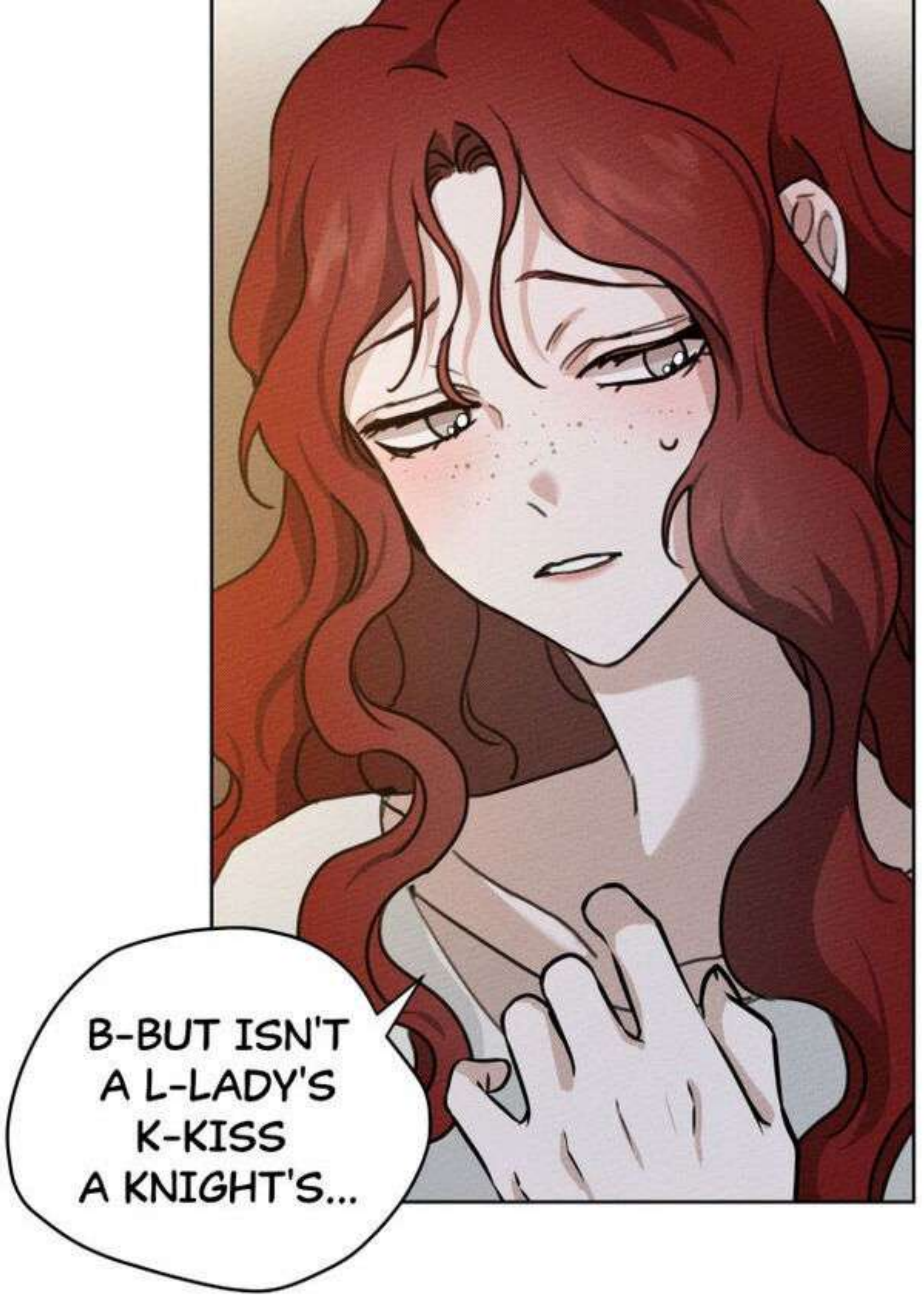
THE MOST ROMANTIC PART WAS THE KISS BETWEEN THE VICTORIOUS BRAVE KNIGHT AND THE NOBLE LADY.
I WONDER IF RIFTAN...
...HAS EVER RECEIVED A KISS AS

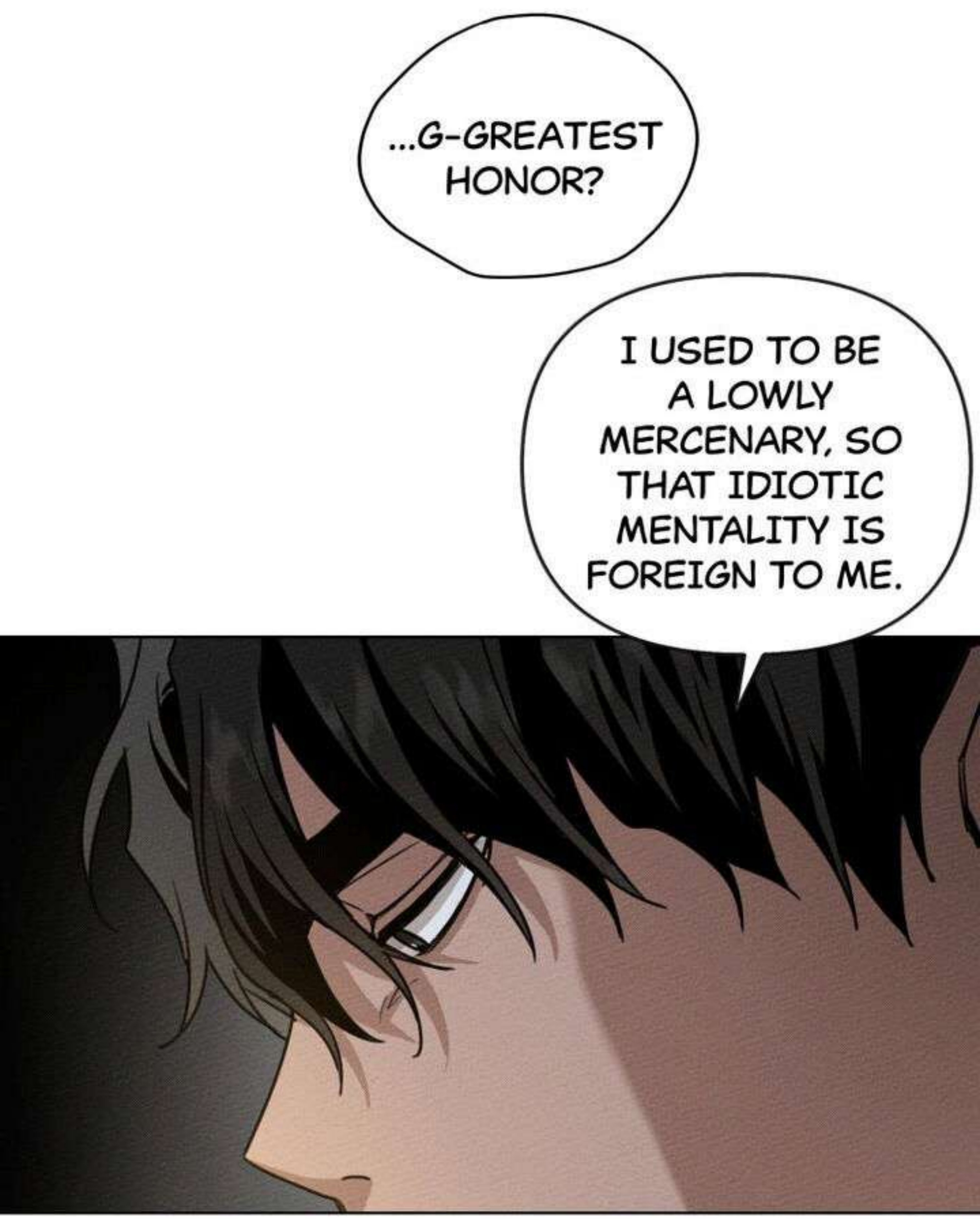

WELL?
PAUSE

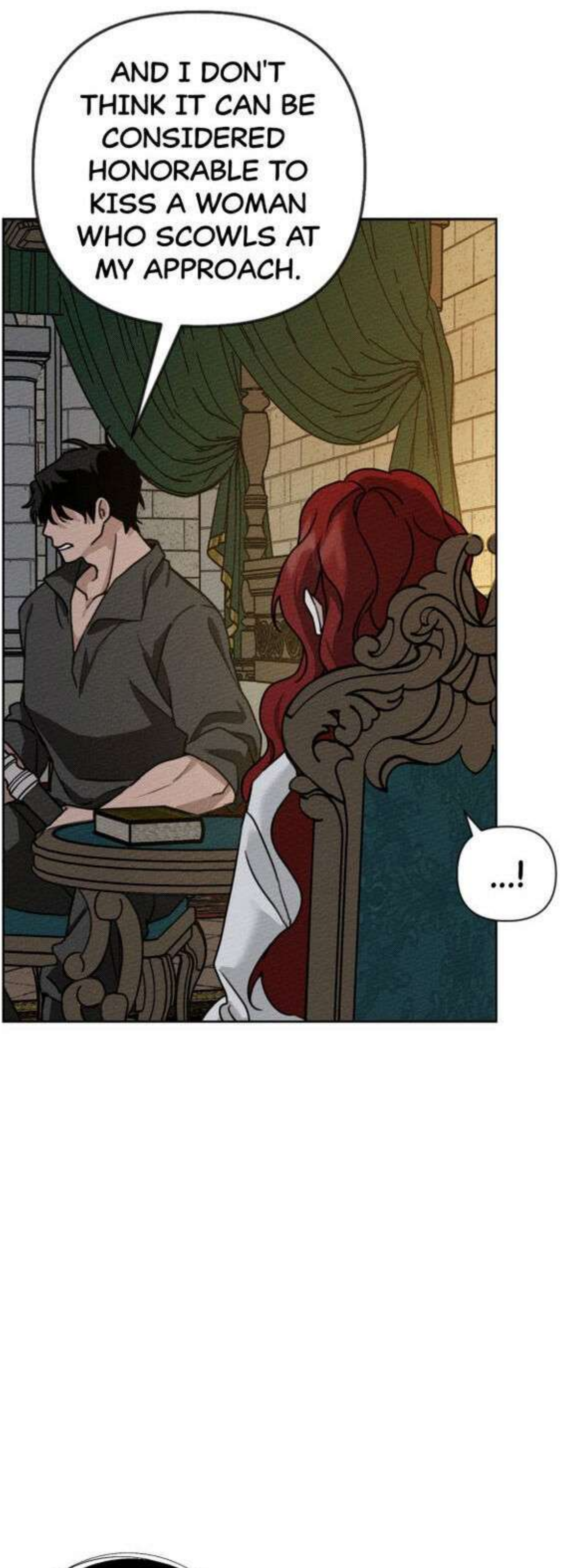

A KISS?
BLUSH
DID I JUST SAY THAT OUT LOUD?
OH,

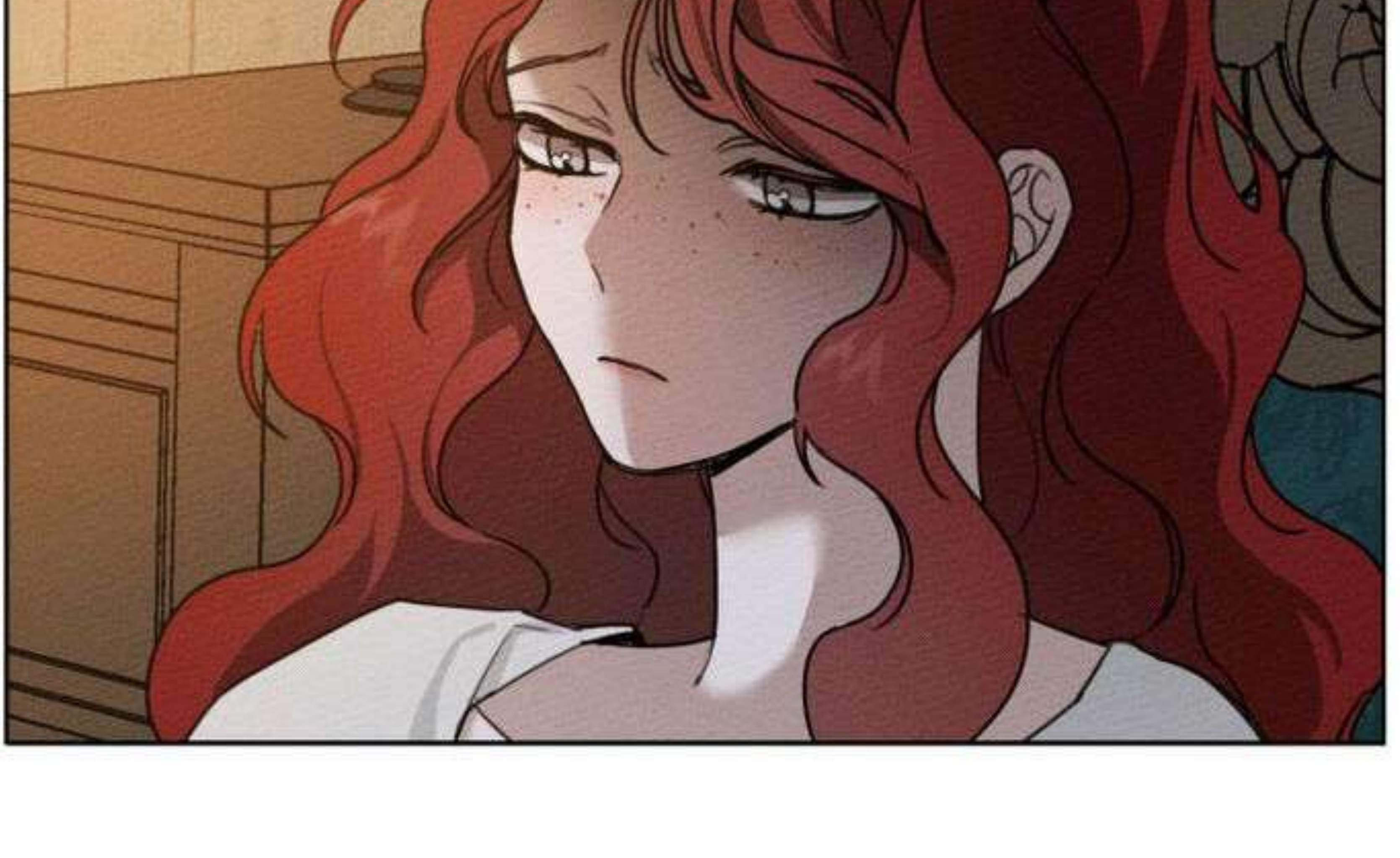
OH, N-NO. I-IT'S JUST...
HE MIGHT THINK IT'S PETTY JEALOUSY.
I R-READ A B-BOOK ONCE ABOUT A KNIGHT AND A P-PRINCESS.
W-WHEN THE KNIGHT W-WON THE J-JOUST...
CLENCH..

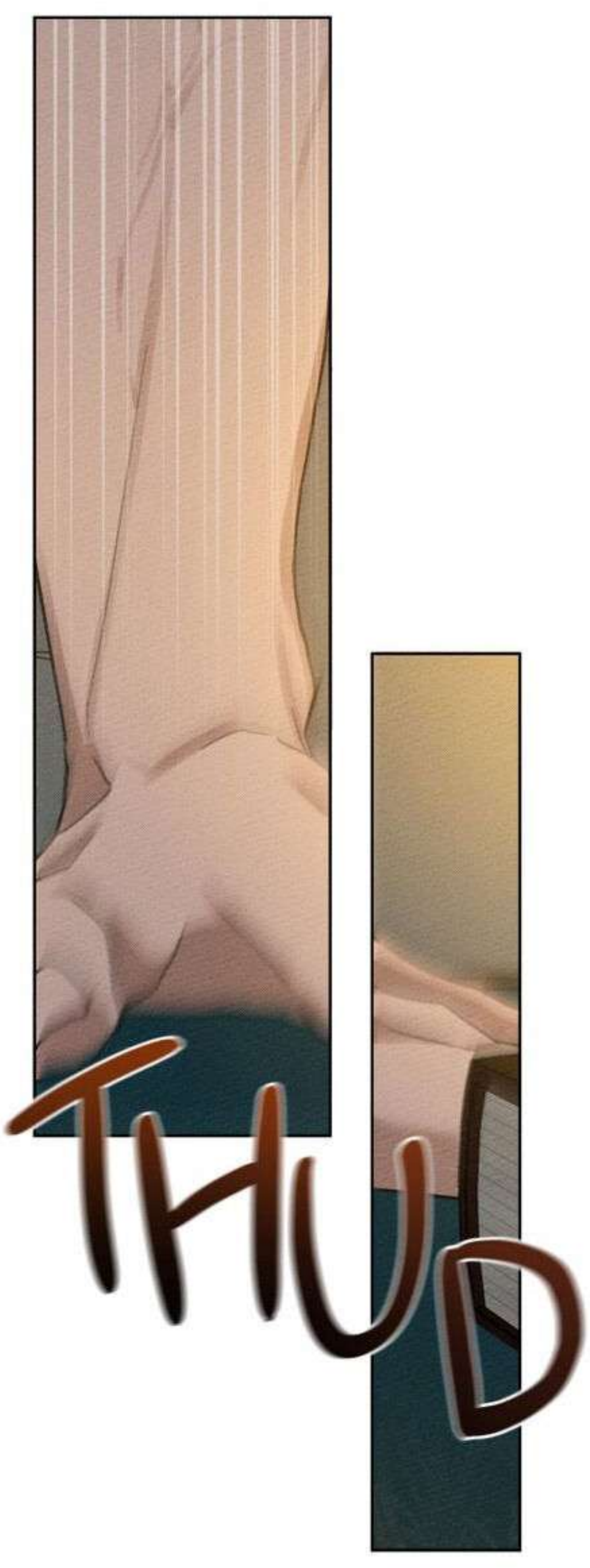
THE P-PRINCESS K-KISSED HIM ON HIS L-LIPS...
I TH-THOUGHT IT WAS W-WONDERFUL...
I FEEL STUPIDER THE MORE I SPEAK.
NO.
SORRY TO DISAPPOINT, BUT...
NOTHING LIKE THAT'S HAPPENED TO ME.

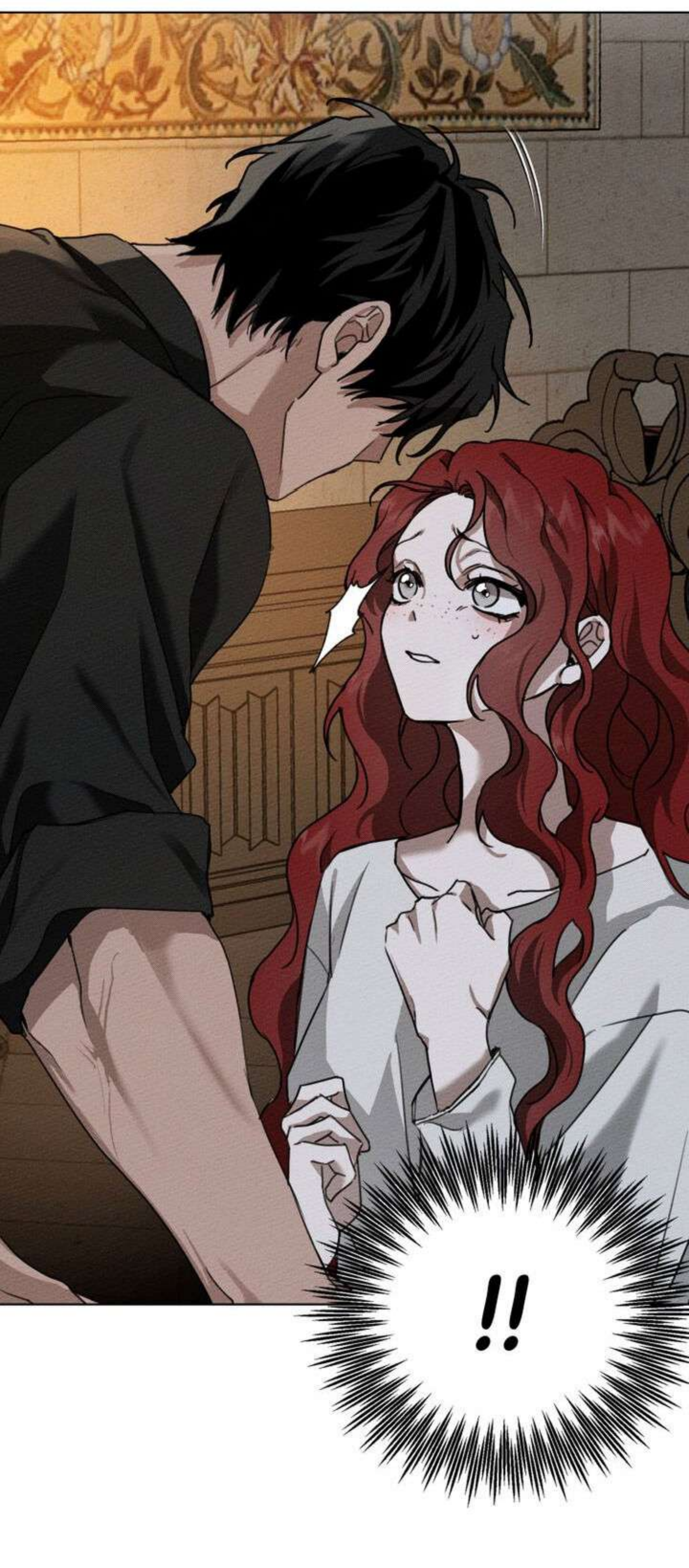

B-BUT ISN'T A L-LADY'S K-KISS A KNIGHT'S...


...G-GREATEST HONOR?
I USED TO BE A LOWLY MERCENARY, SO THAT IDIOTIC MENTALITY IS FOREIGN TO ME.

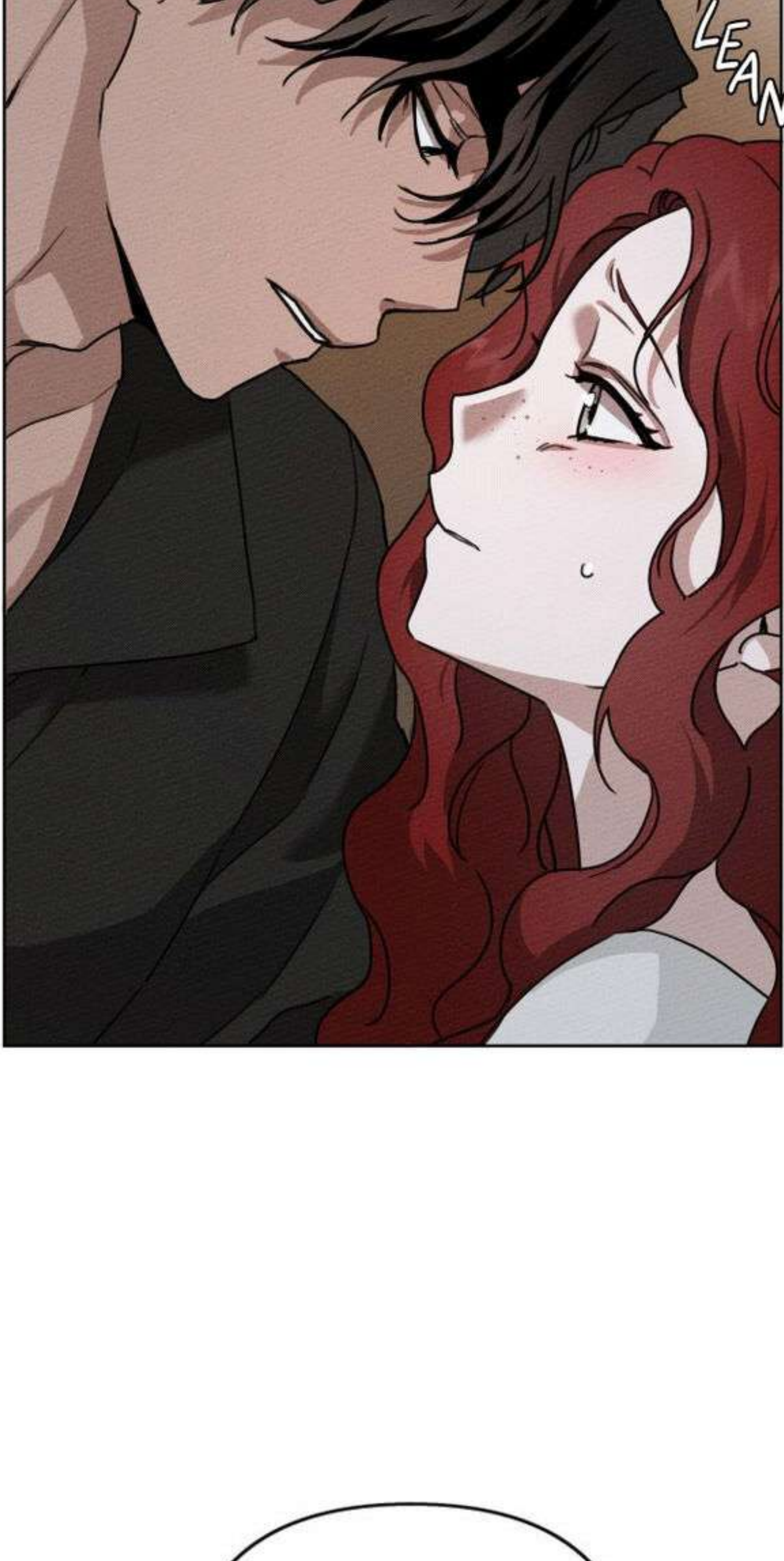

AND I DON'T THINK IT CAN BE CONSIDERED HONORABLE TO KISS A WOMAN WHO SCOWLS AT MY APPROACH.
...!


IS THAT TRUE?


THUD


!!

ARE YOU


LEAN

NOT FEELING WELL? YOU DON'T LOOK GOOD.

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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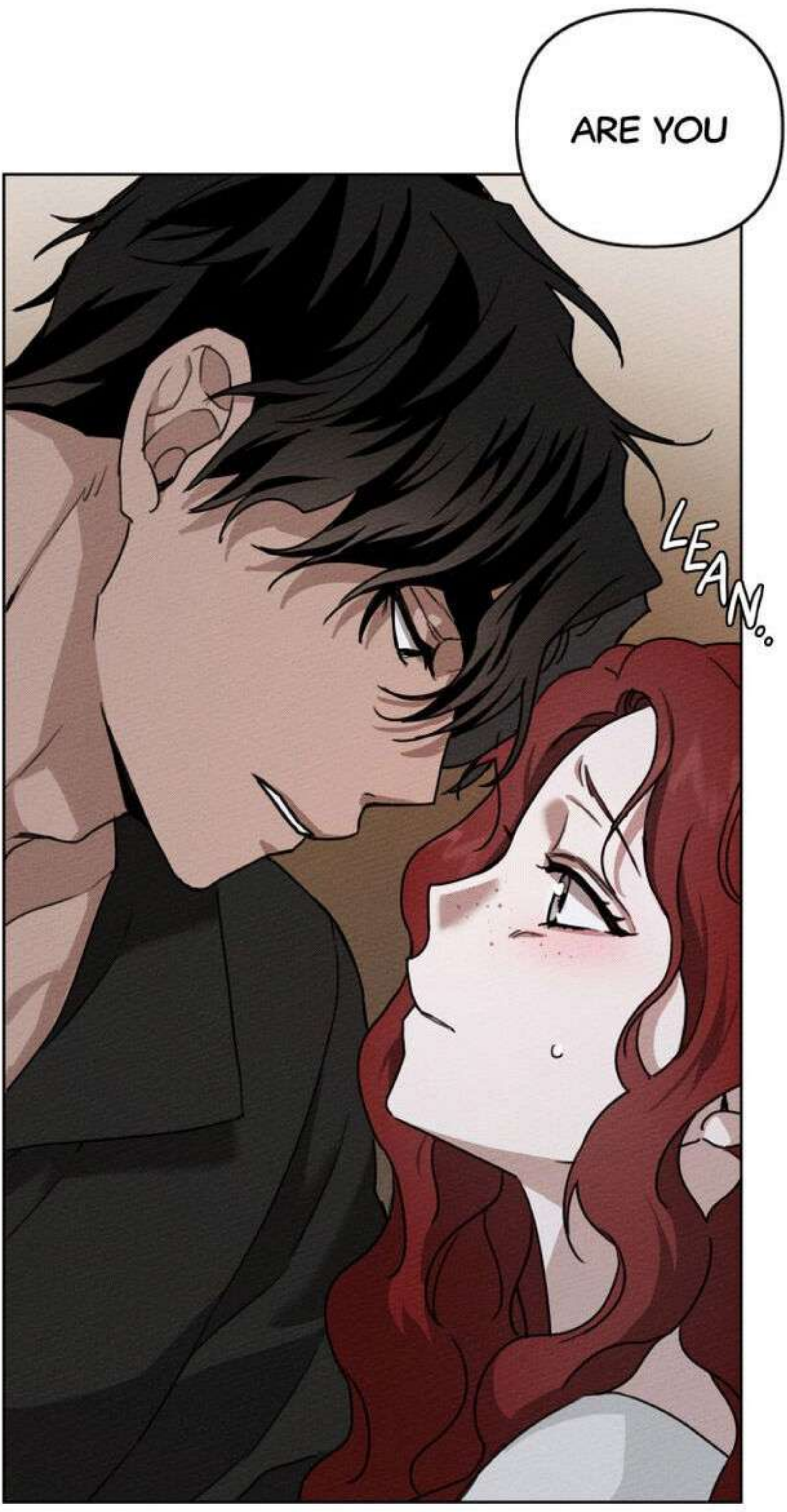
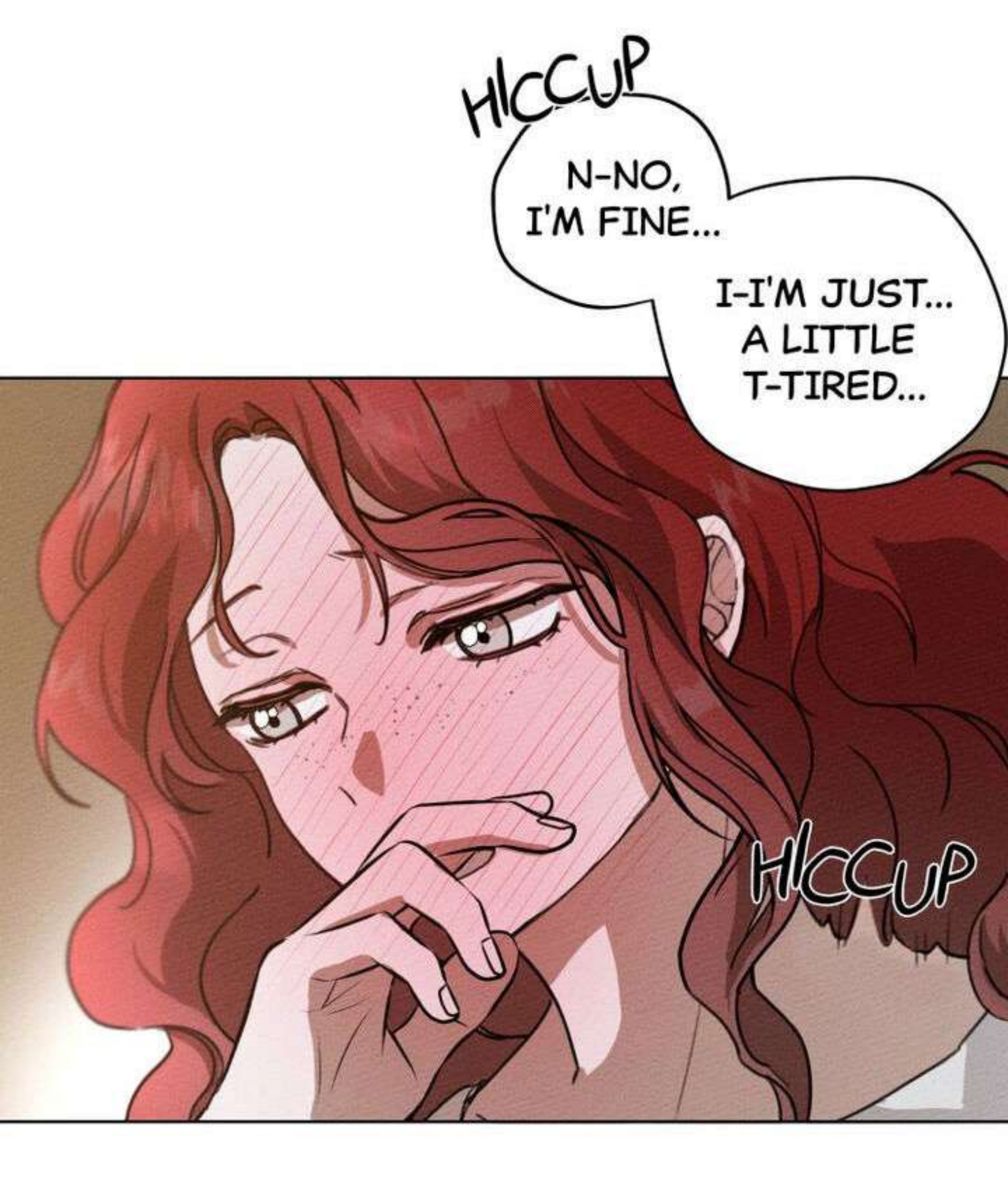
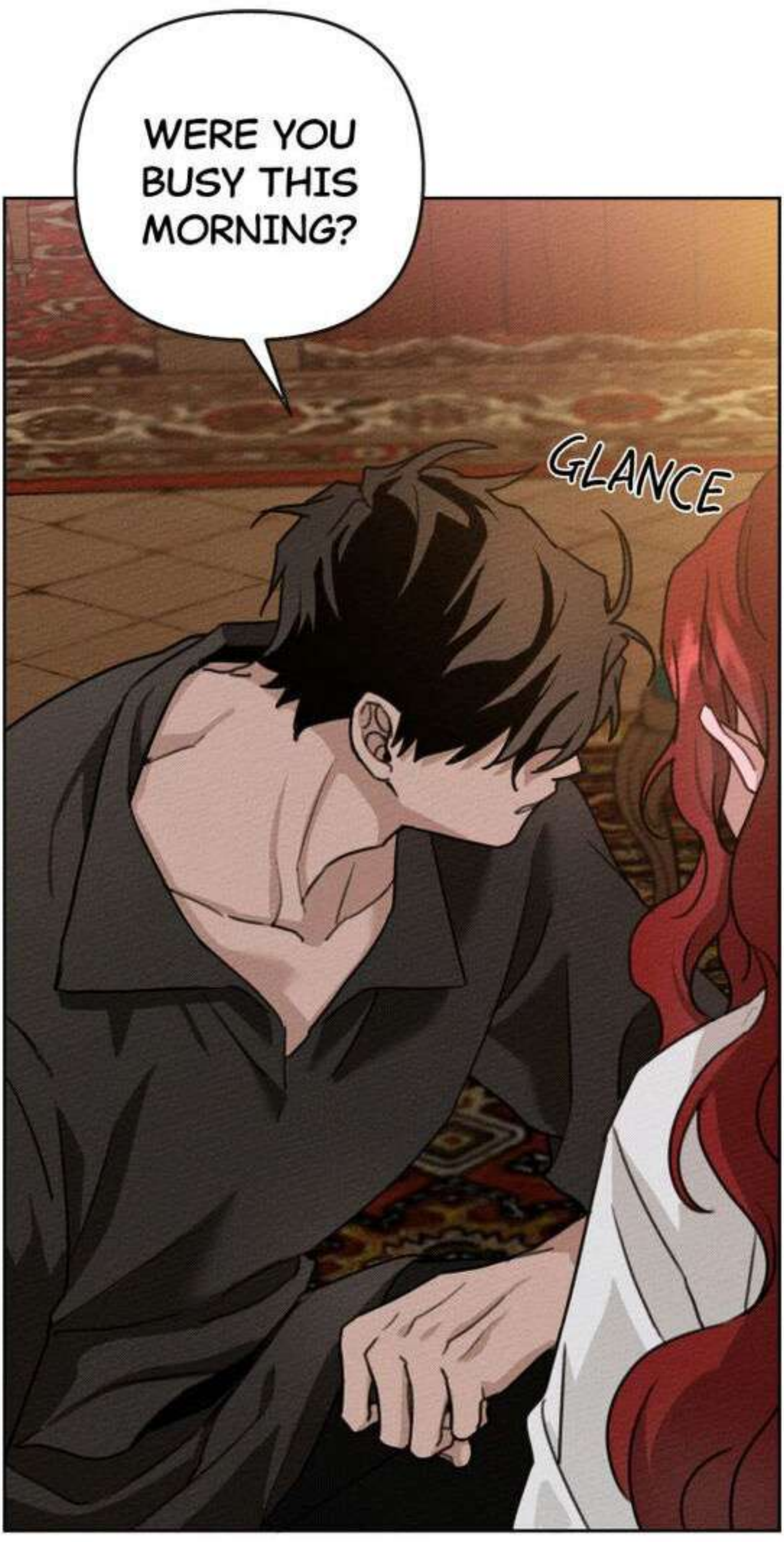
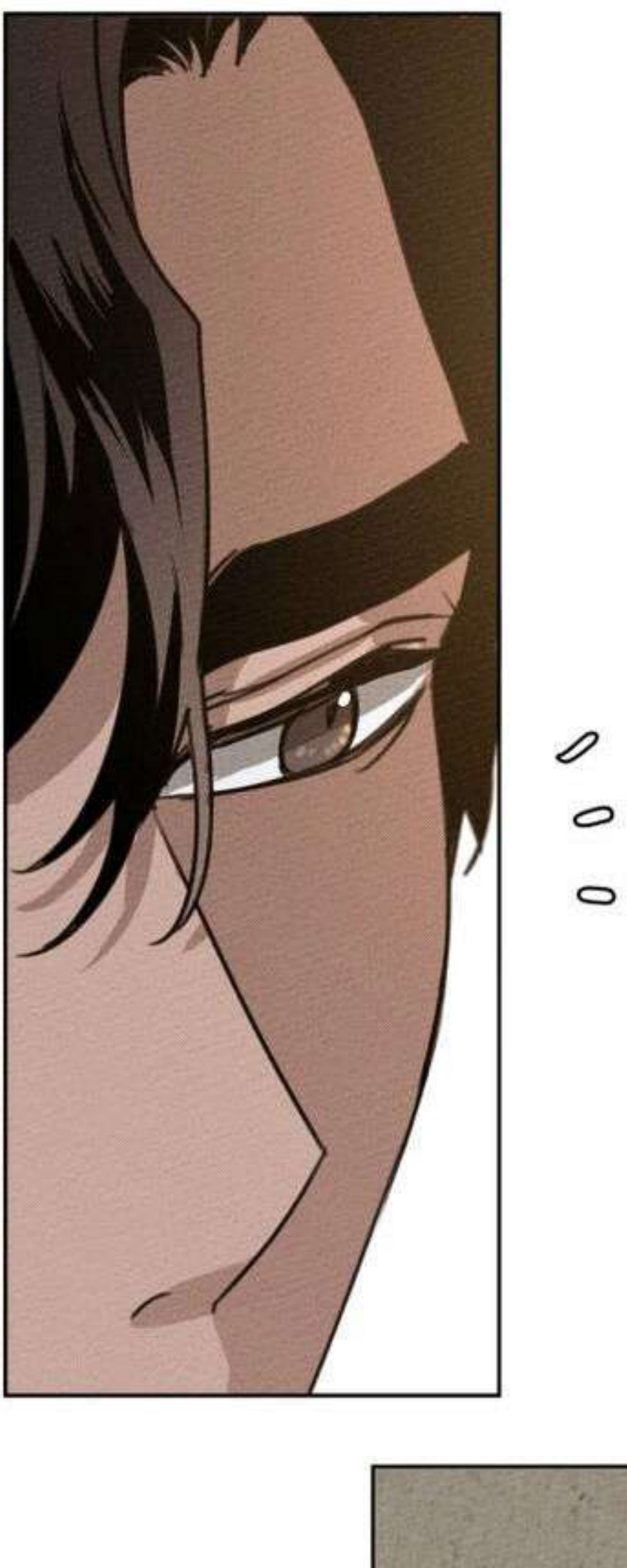
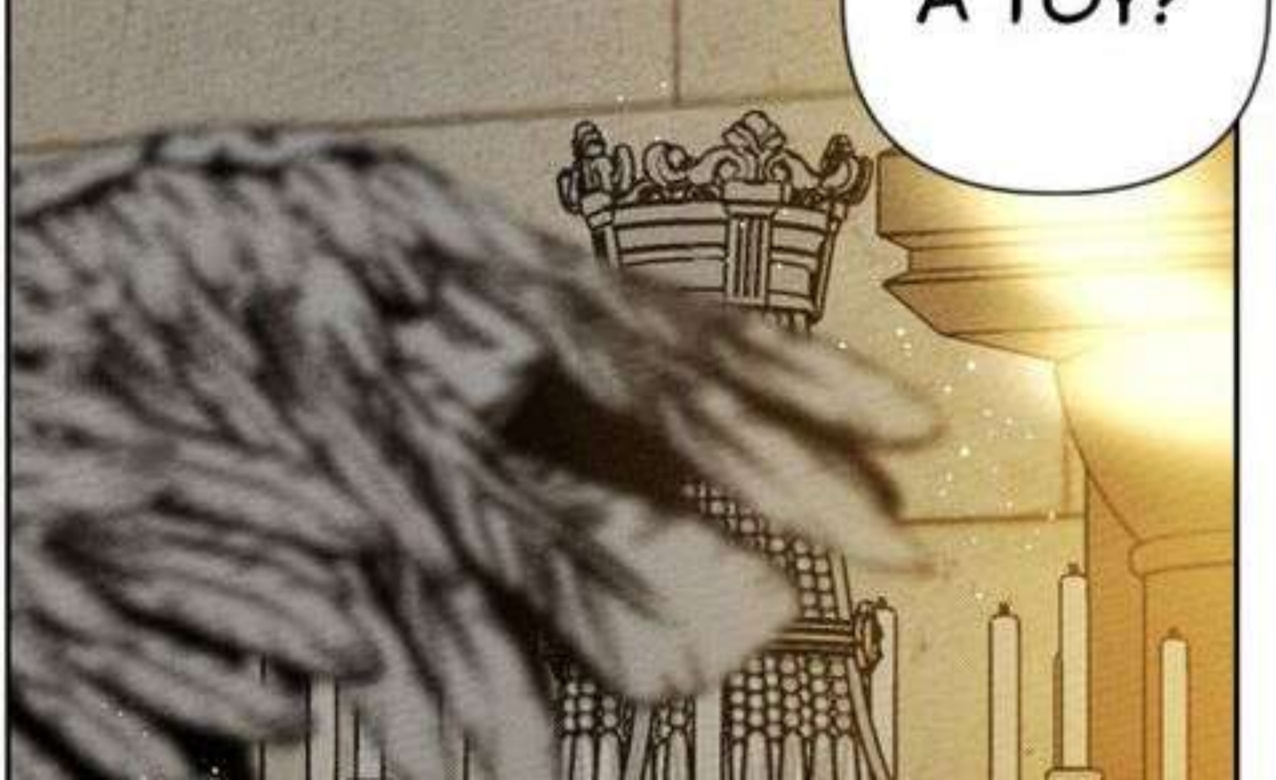
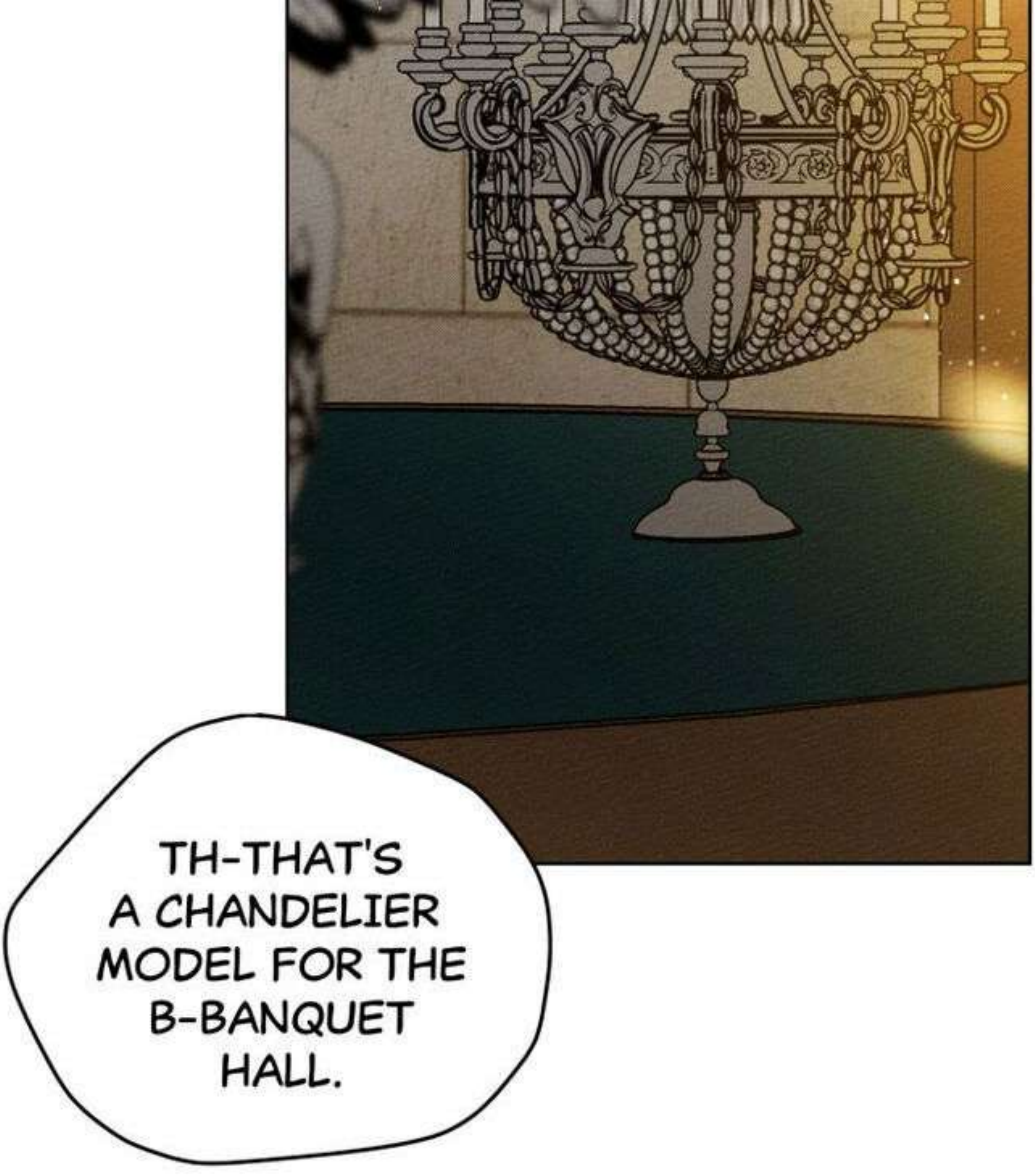

ARE YOU
LEAN..
NOT FEELING WELL? YOU DON'T LOOK GOOD.

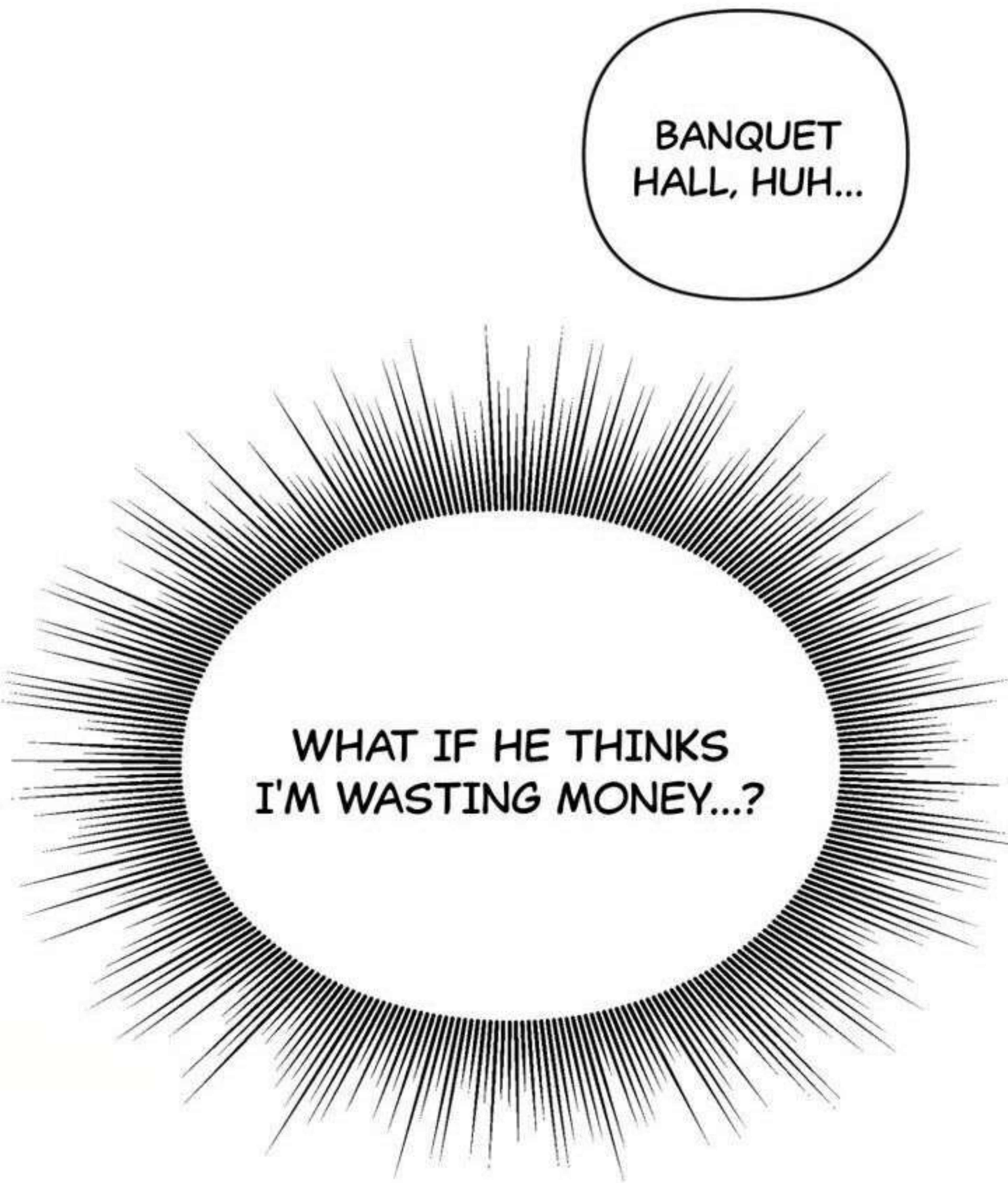

HICCUP
N-NO, I'M FINE...
I-I'M JUST... A LITTLE T-TIRED...
HICCUP

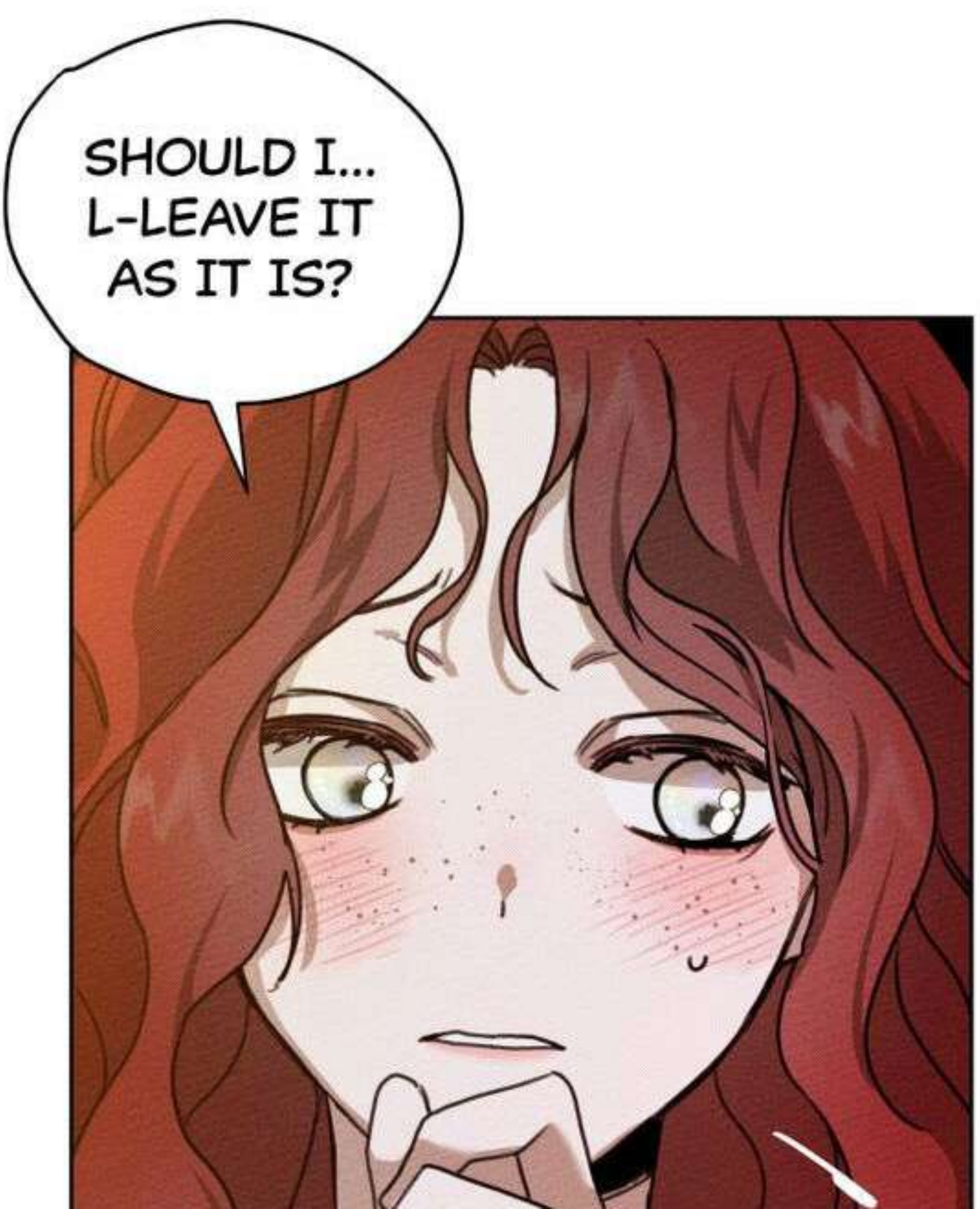

WERE YOU BUSY THIS MORNING?
GLANCE

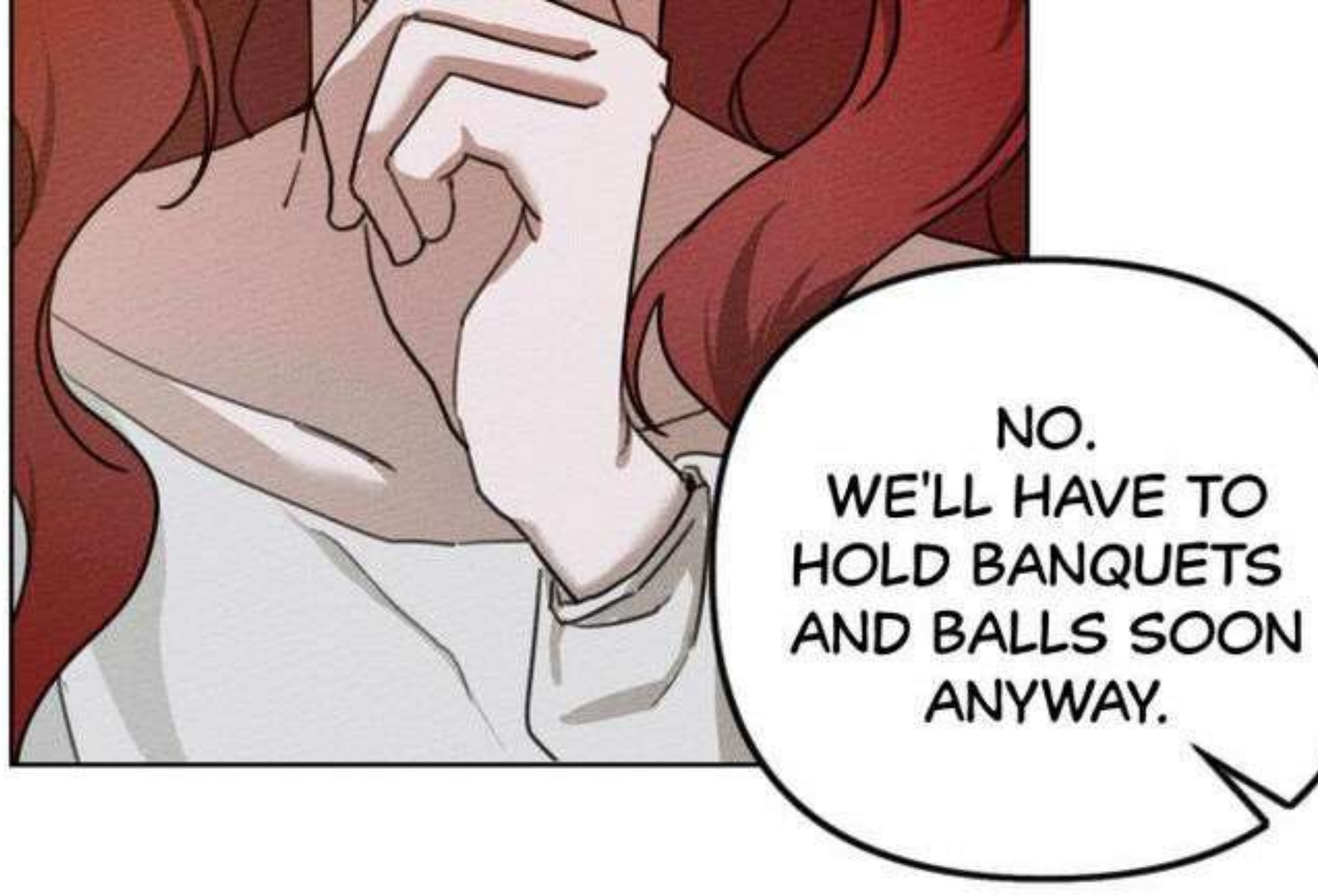



IS THIS
A TOY?

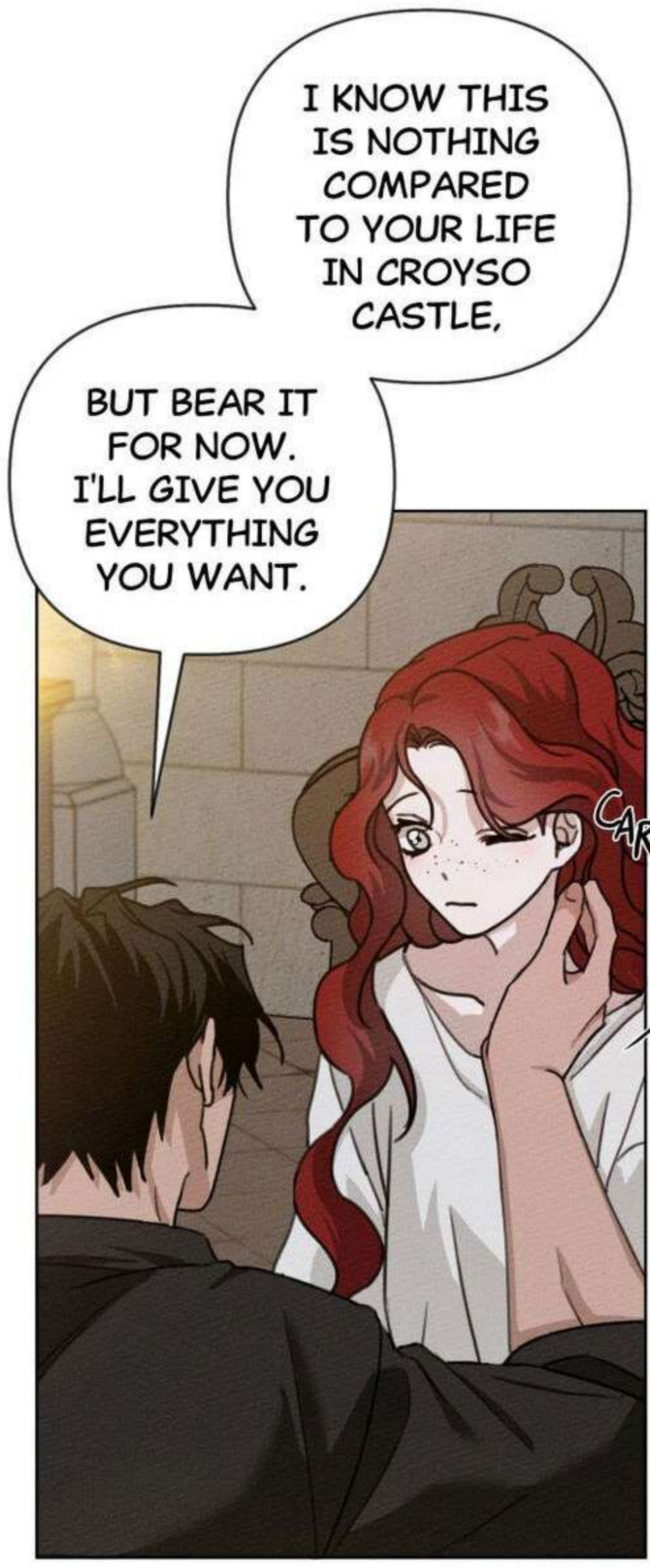

TH-THAT'S A CHANDELIER MODEL FOR THE B-BANQUET HALL.

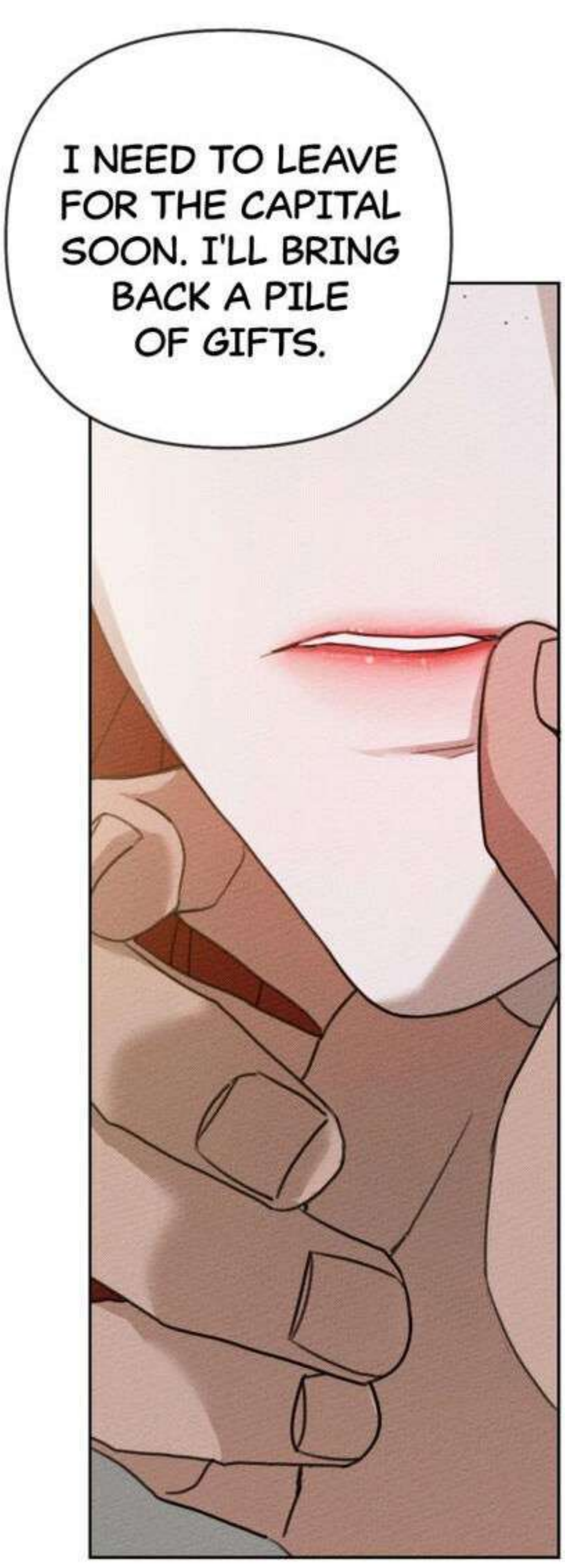

BANQUET HALL, HUH...
WHAT IF HE THINKS I'M WASTING MONEY...?


SHOULD I... L-LEAVE IT AS IT IS?

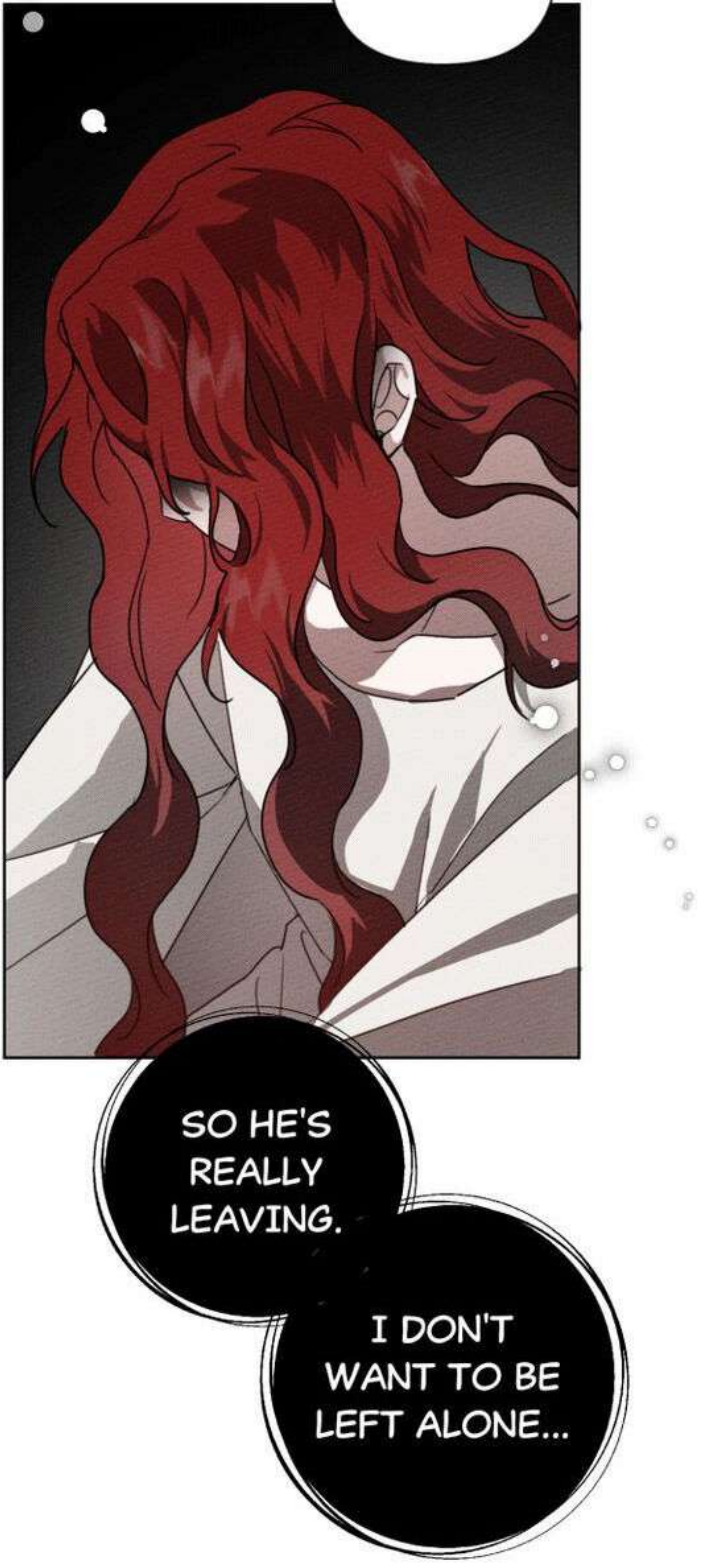

NO.
WE'LL HAVE TO HOLD BANQUETS AND BALLS SOON ANYWAY.

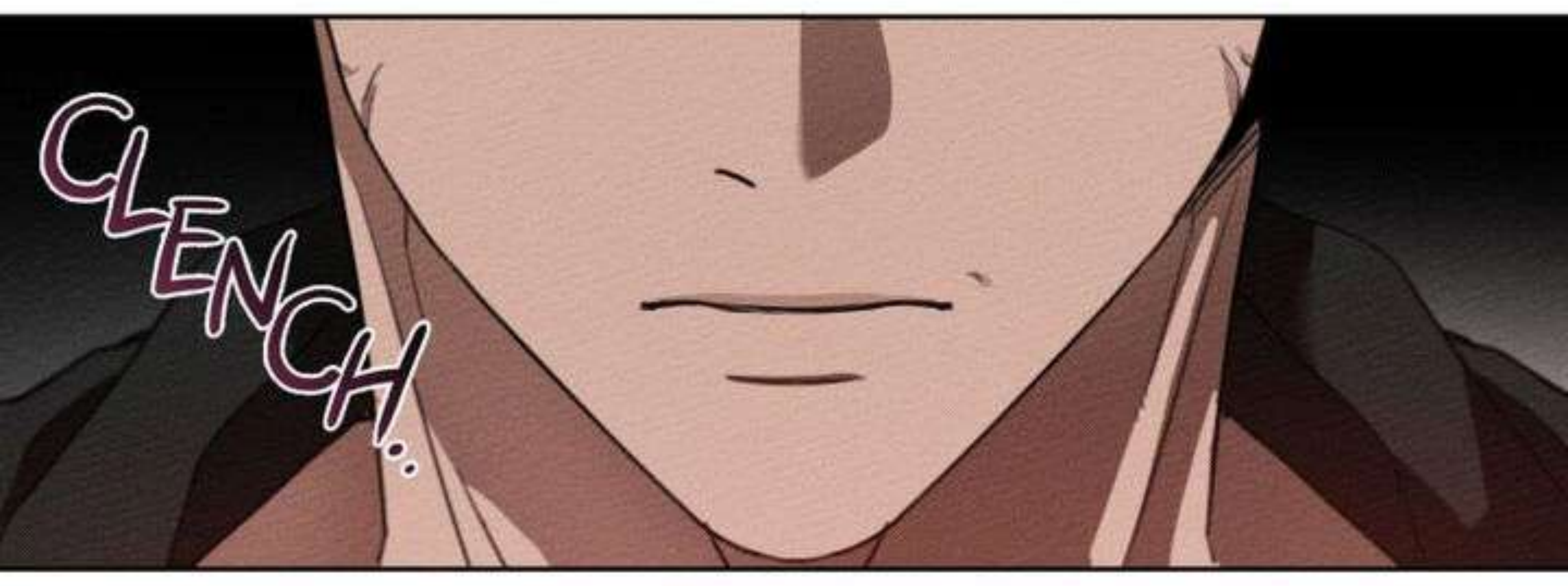
FOR YOU,
SLIDE..
I'LL HOLD THE GRANDEST BANQUET IN WEDON.

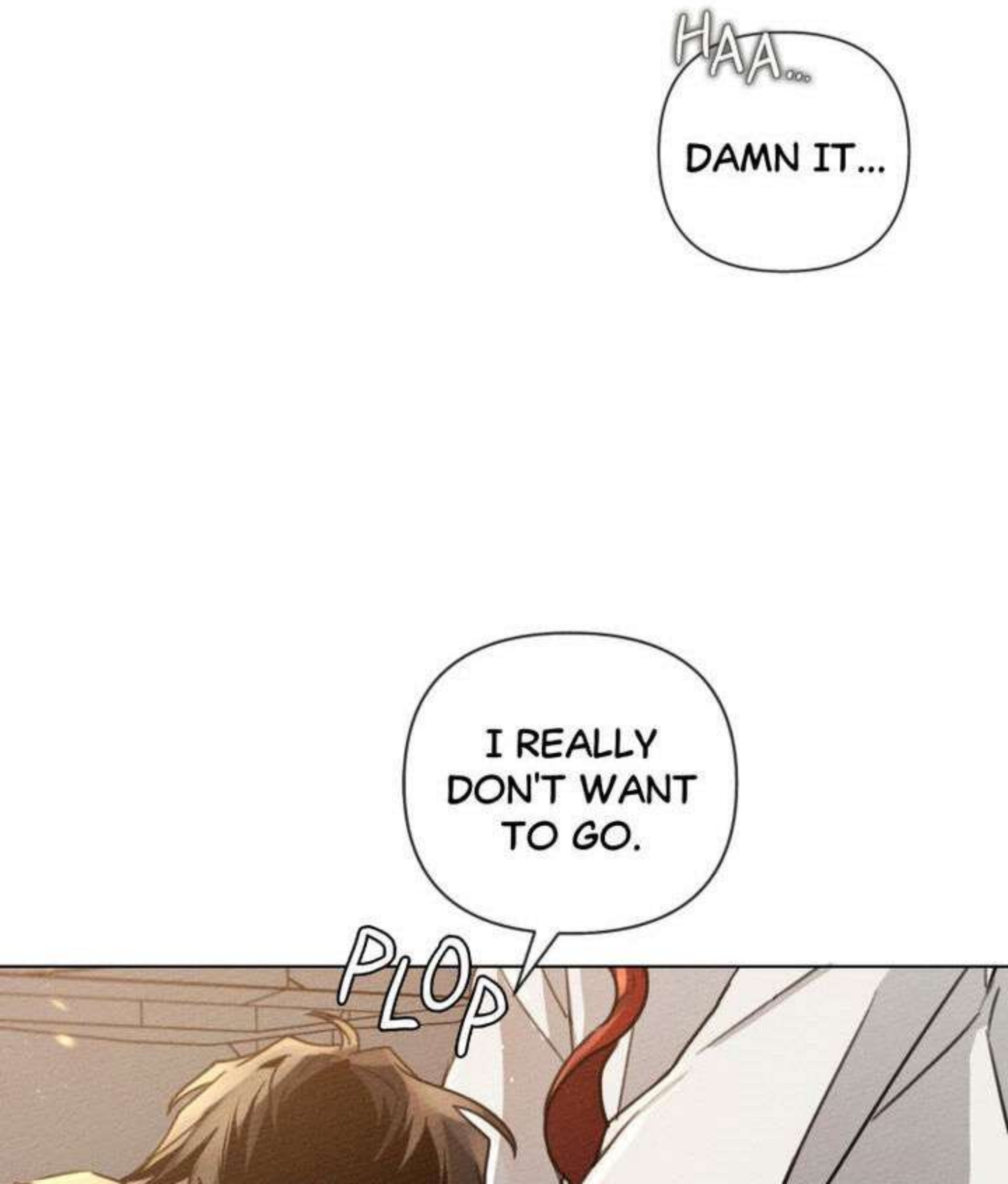

I KNOW THIS IS NOTHING COMPARED TO YOUR LIFE IN CROYSO CASTLE,
BUT BEAR IT FOR NOW. I'LL GIVE YOU EVERYTHING YOU WANT.
CARESS..

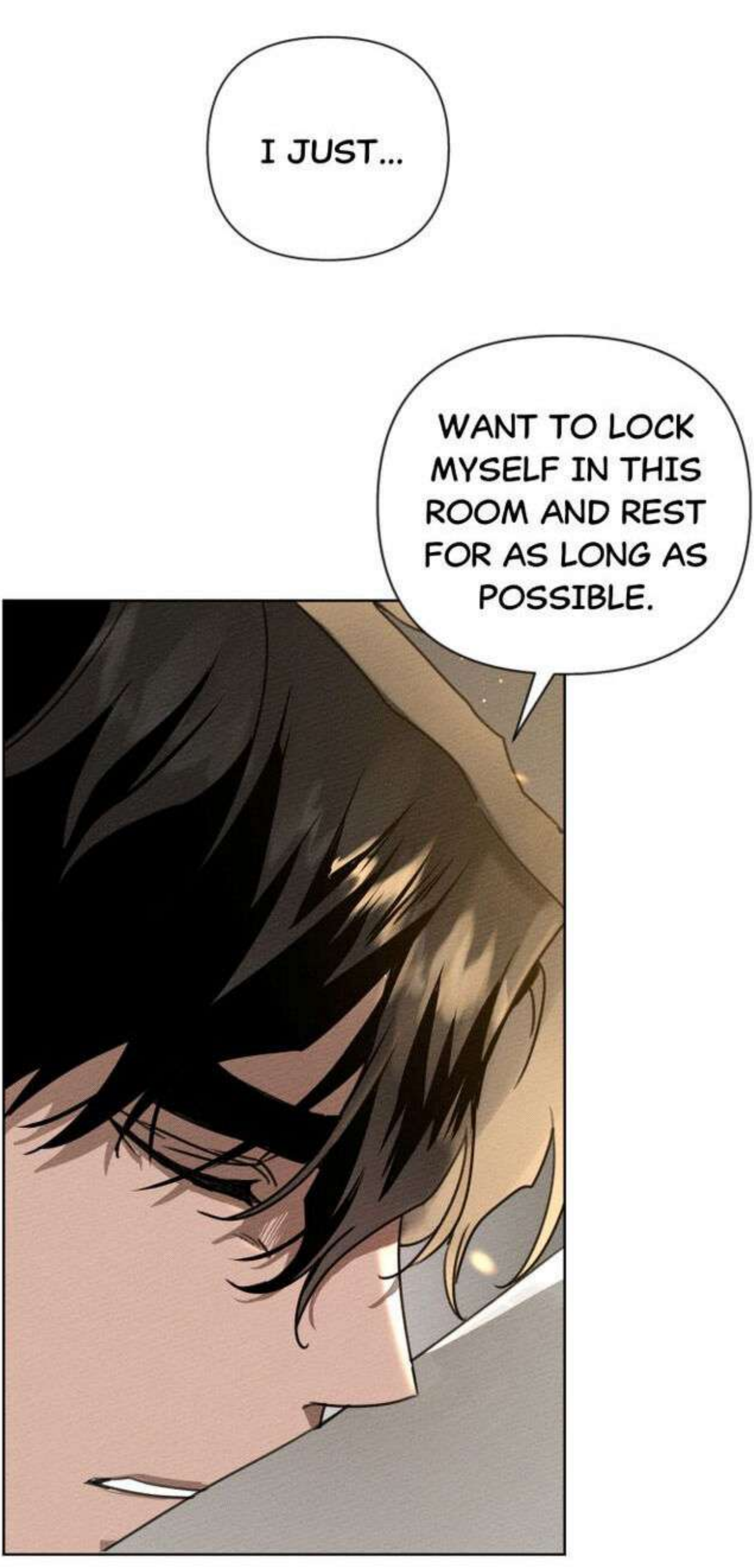

I NEED TO LEAVE FOR THE CAPITAL SOON. I'LL BRING BACK A PILE OF GIFTS.

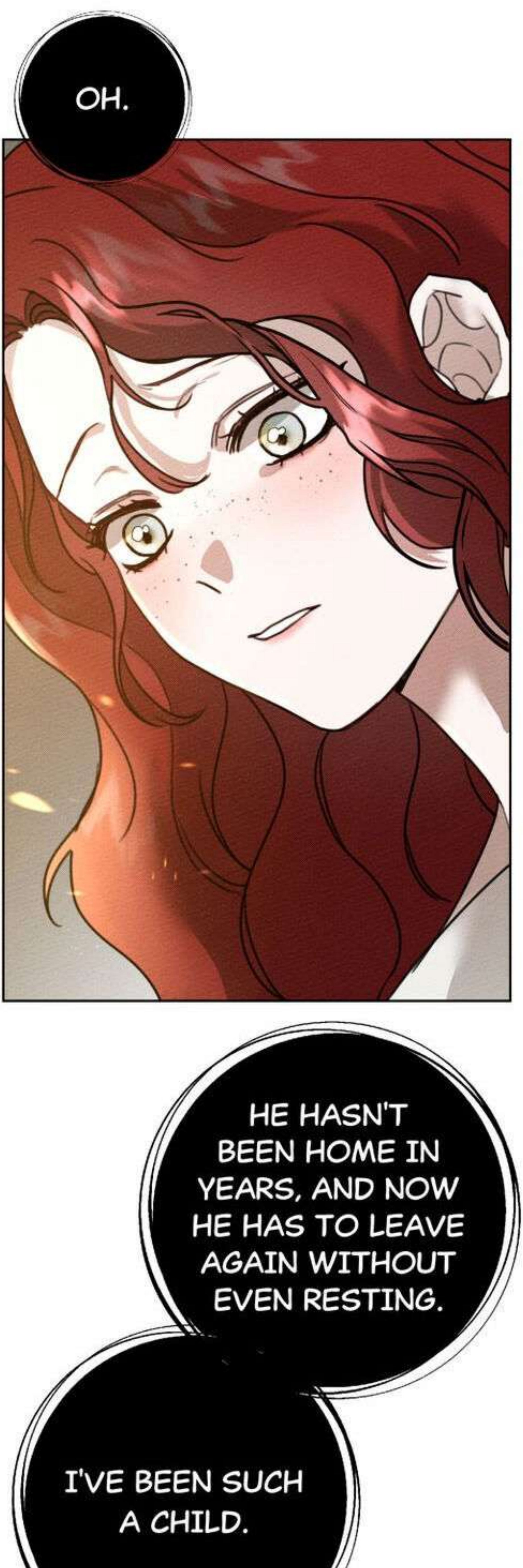
O-OKAY...

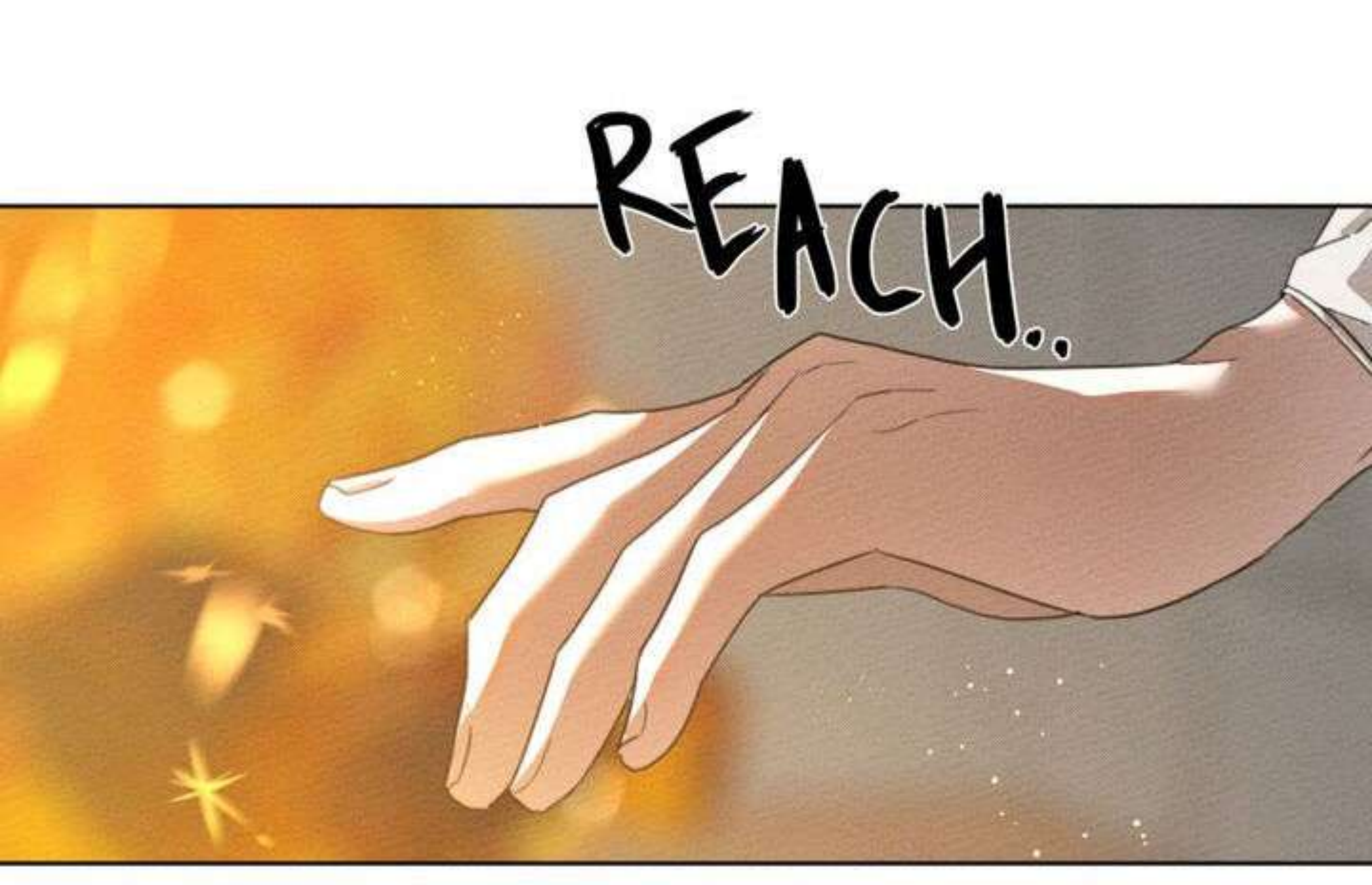

SO HE'S REALLY LEAVING.
I DON'T WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE...

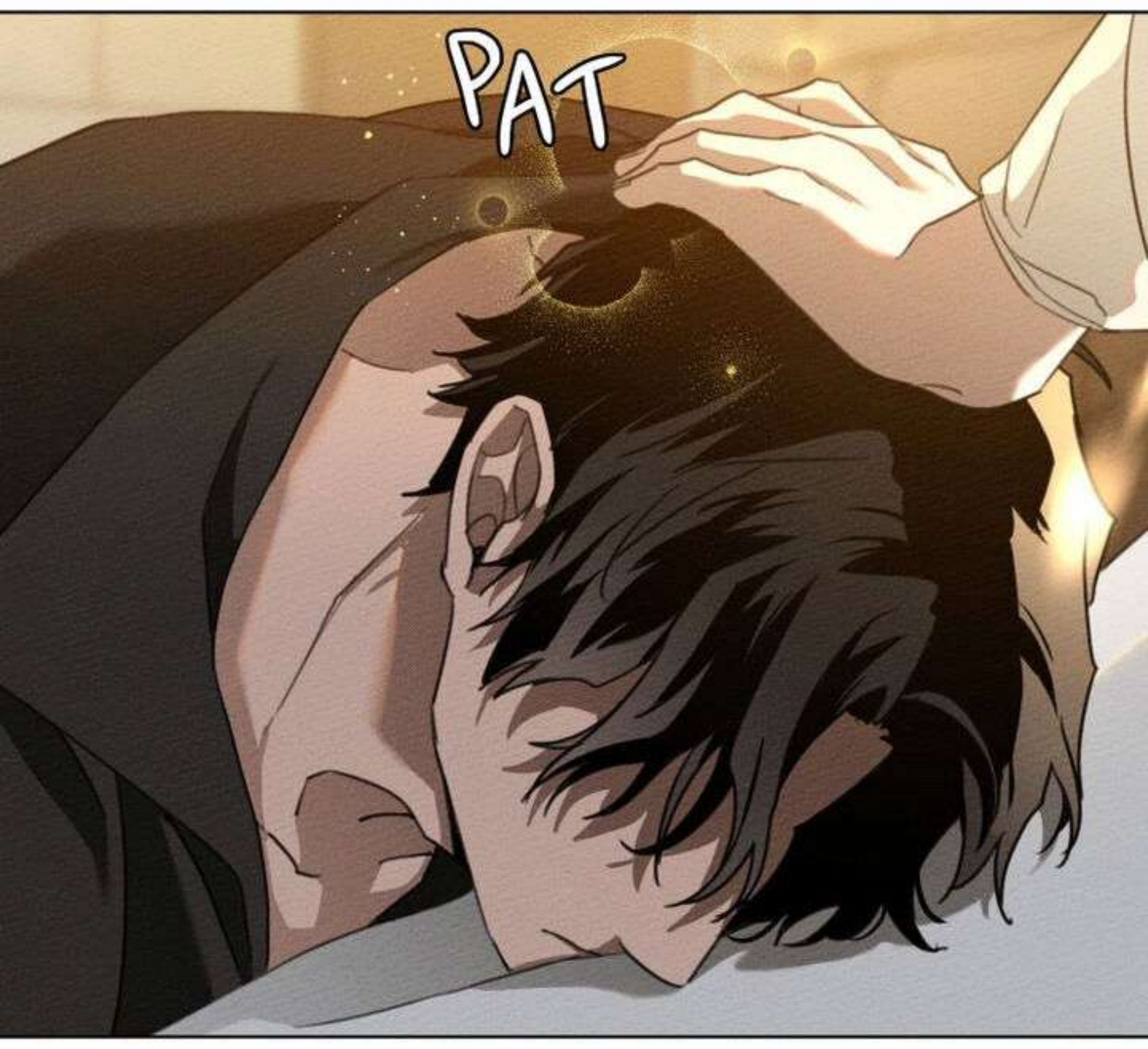

CLENCH..


HAA...
DAMN IT...
I REALLY DON'T WANT TO GO.
PLOP

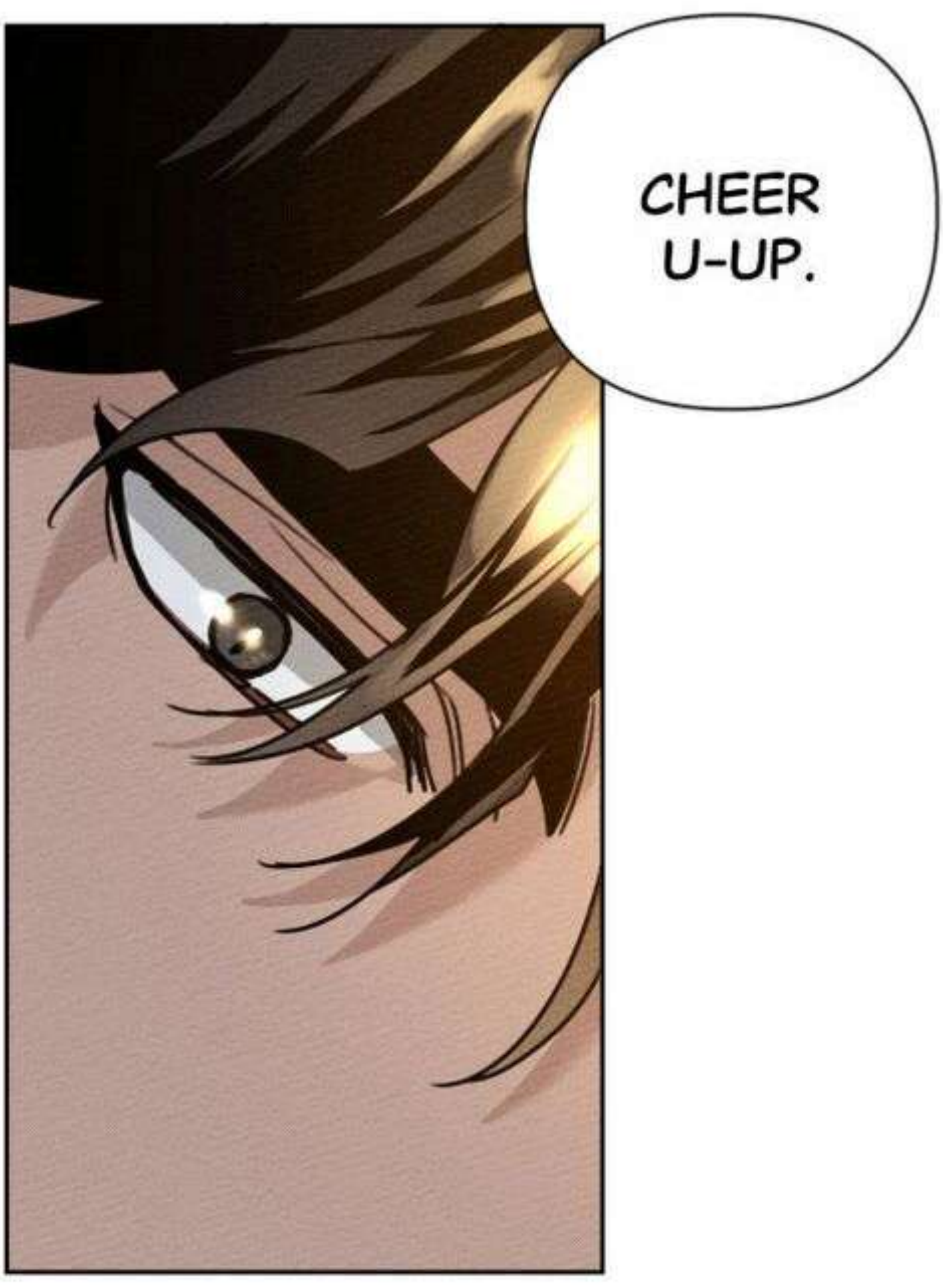

I JUST...
WANT TO LOCK MYSELF IN THIS ROOM AND REST FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

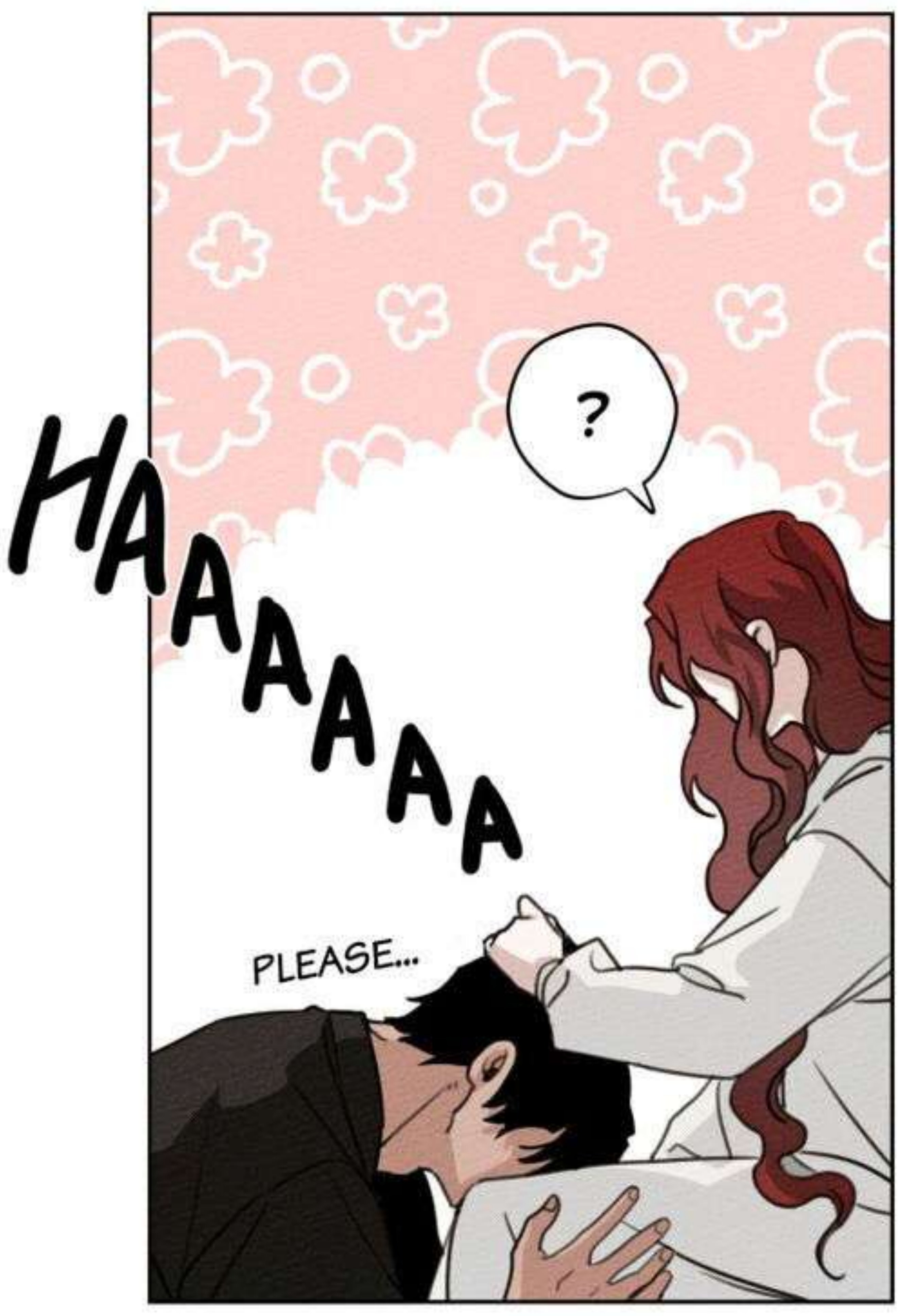

OH.
HE HASN'T BEEN HOME IN YEARS, AND NOW HE HAS TO LEAVE AGAIN WITHOUT EVEN RESTING.
I'VE BEEN SUCH A CHILD.


REACH..

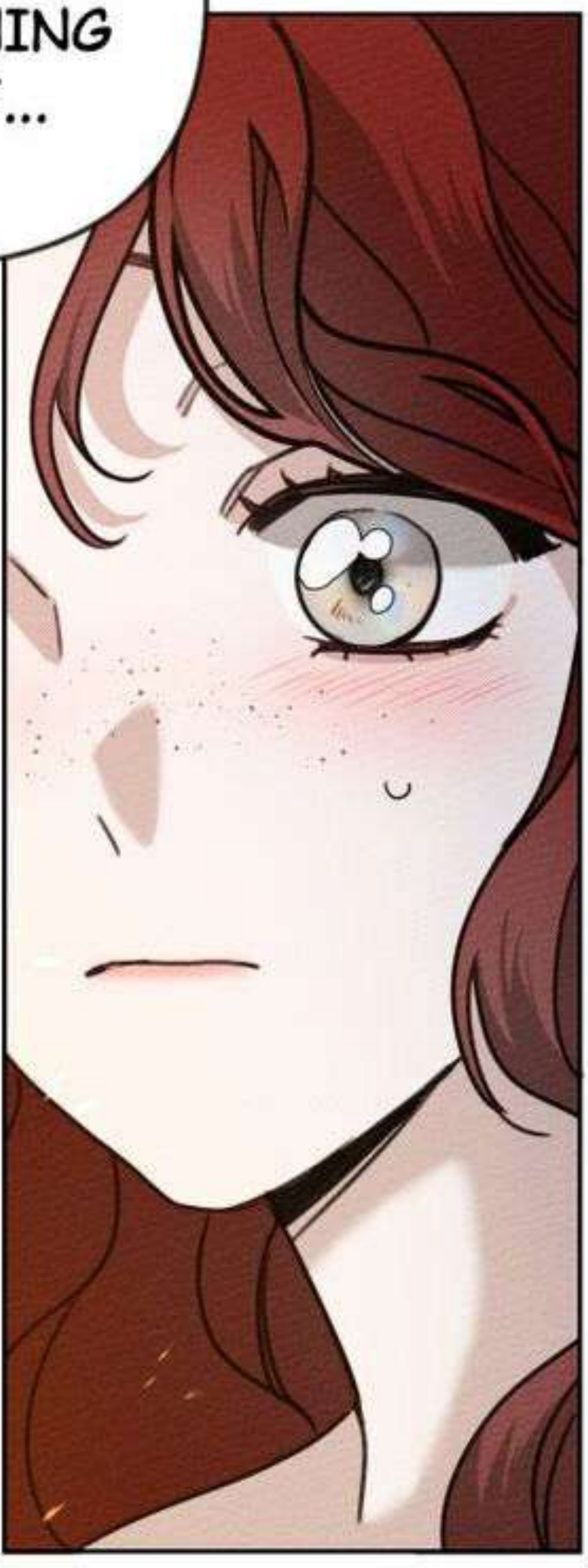


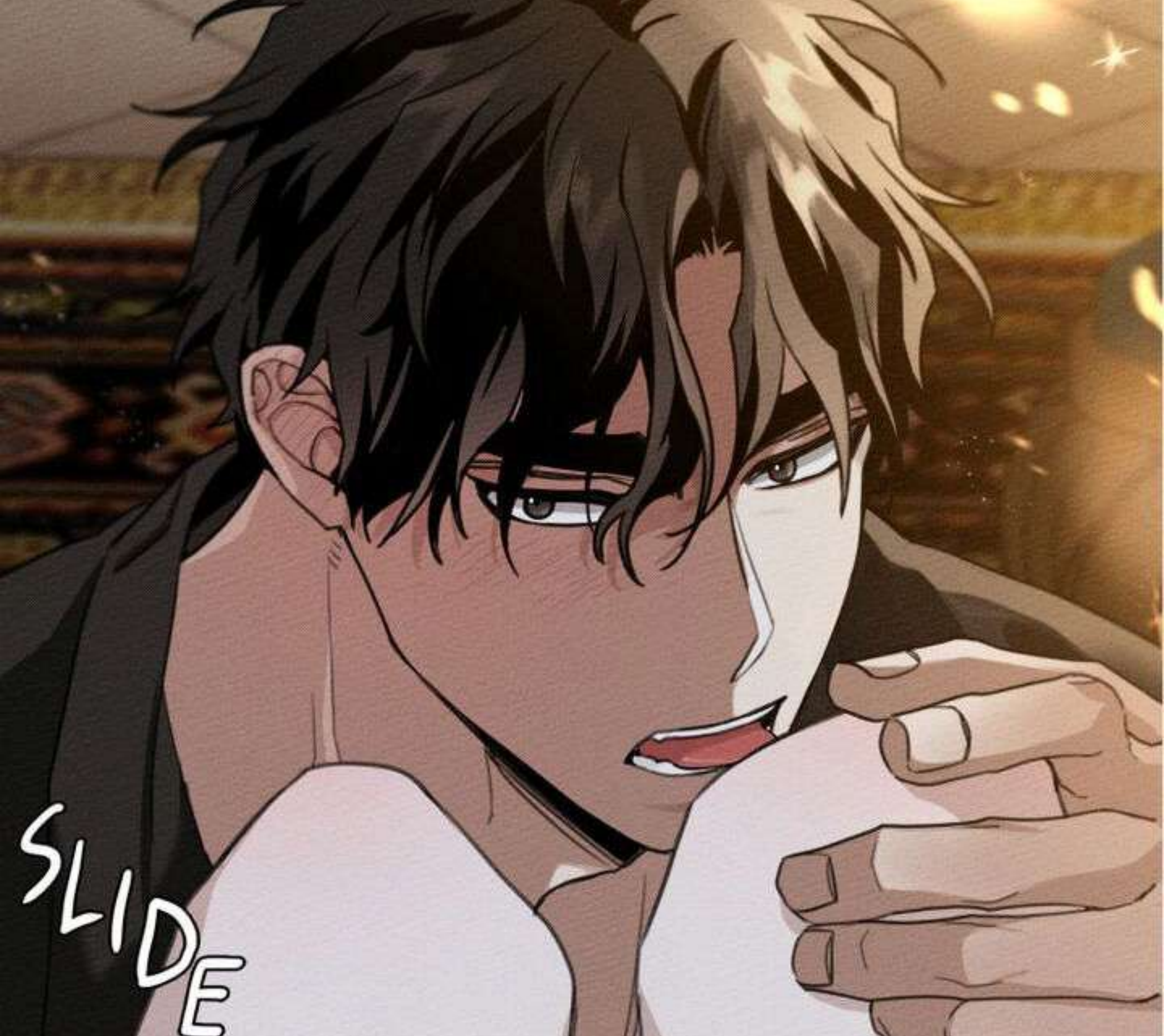
... CH-

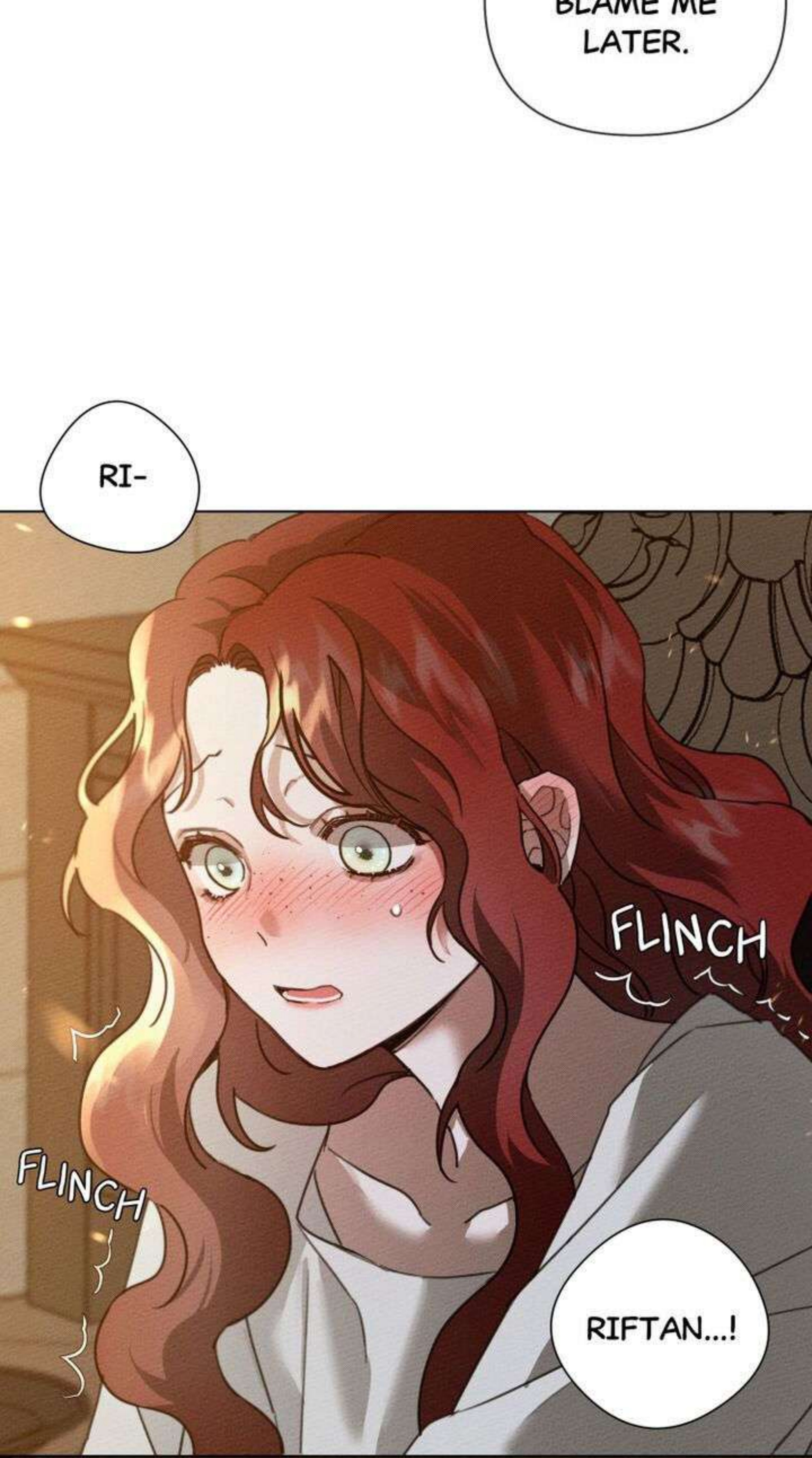



?
HAAAAAA
PLEASE...

YOU REALLY
ARE...


I'VE BEEN BARELY RESTRAINING MYSELF...


YOU STARTED THIS,
SLIDE
SO DON'T BLAME ME


BLAME ME LATER.
RI-
FLINCH
FLINCH
RIFTAN...!

AH
W-WAIT...!

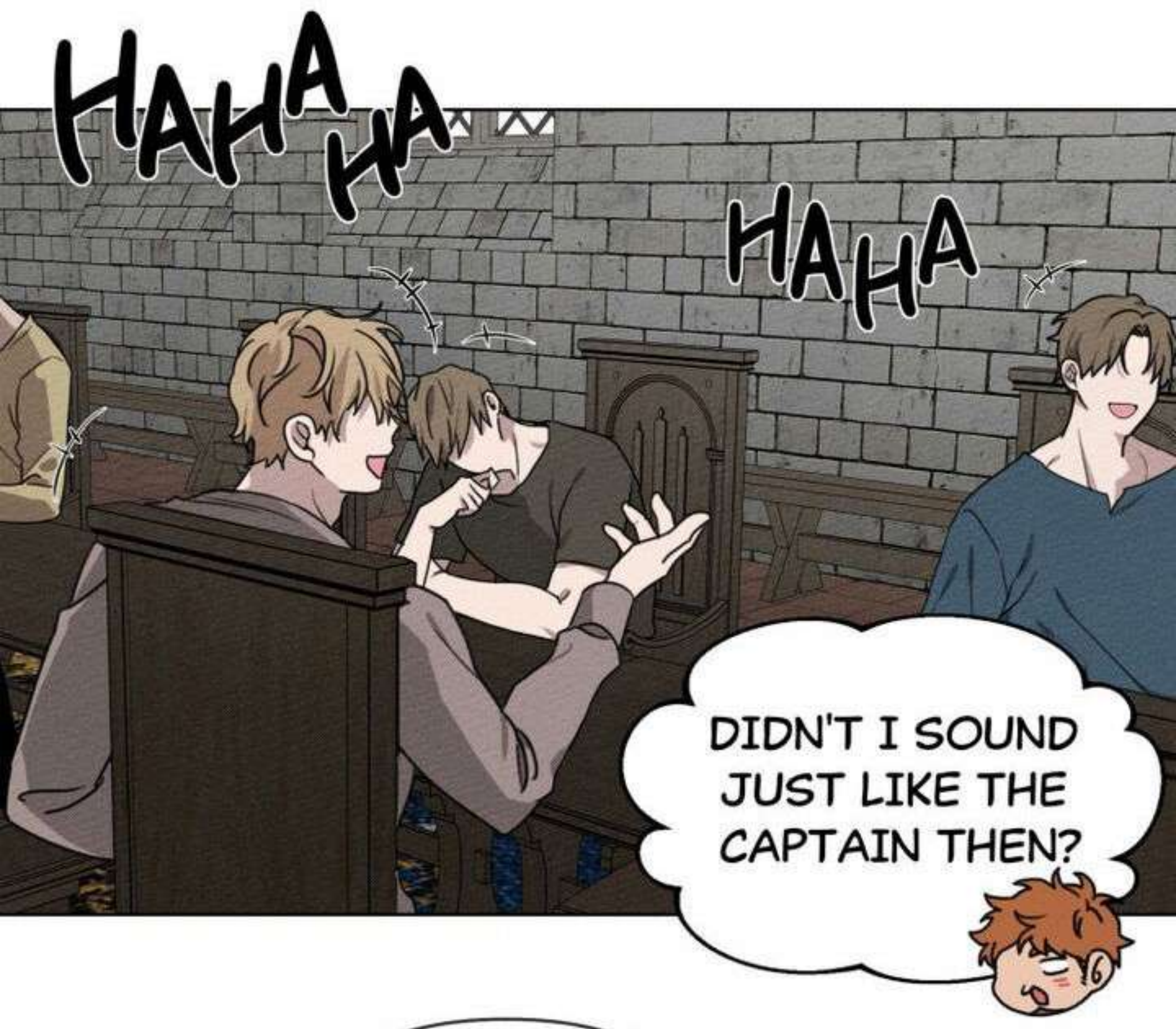
SHHH...

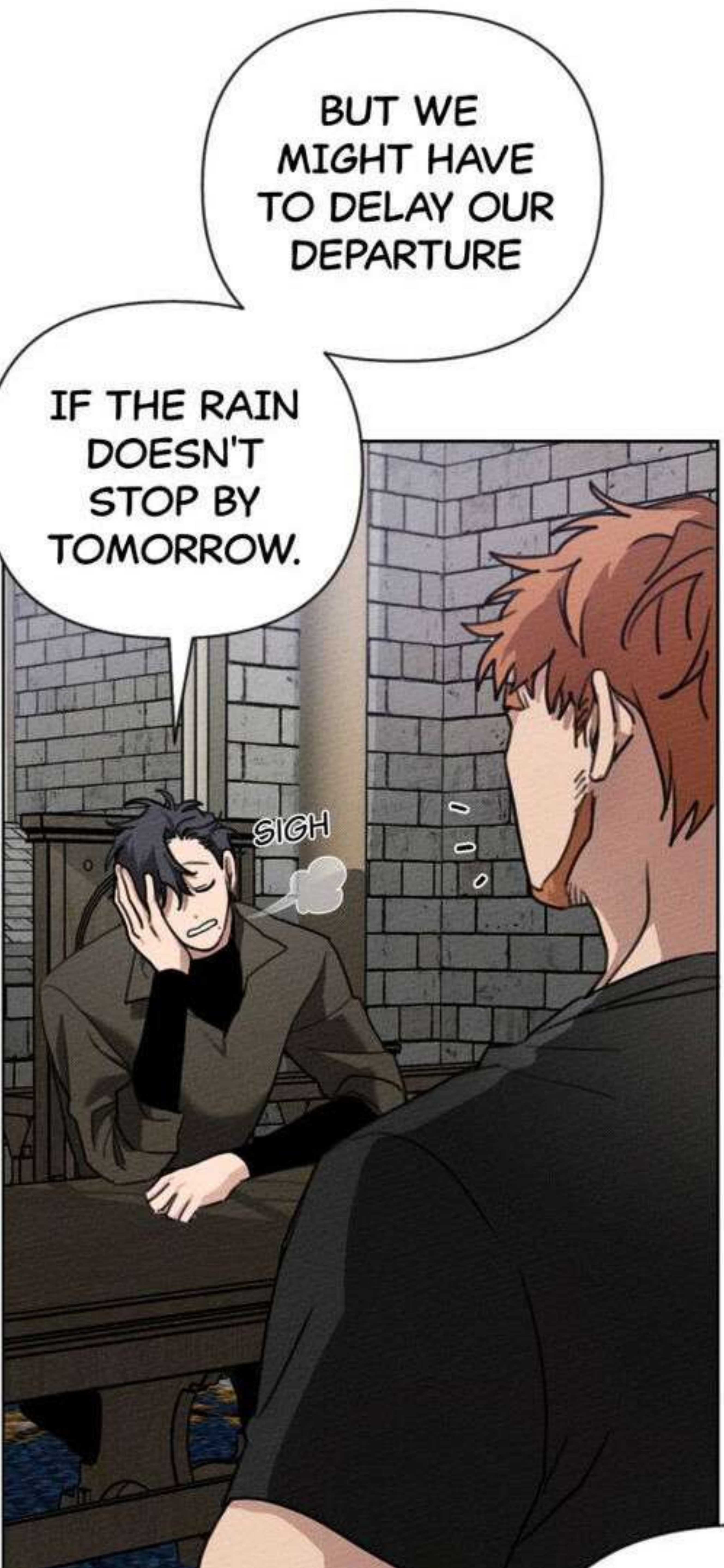
HAHA,

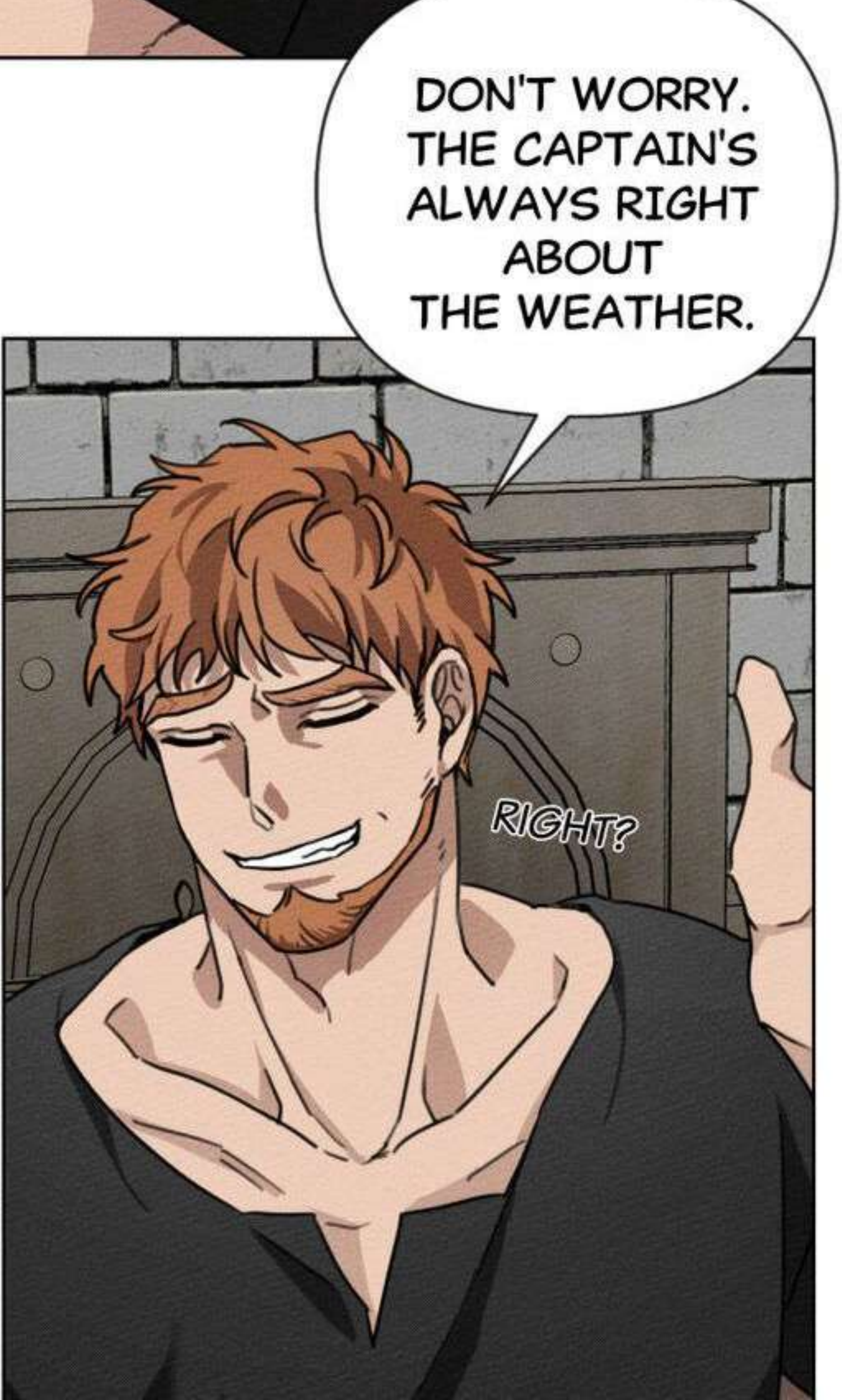
I'M TELLING YOU, THE CAPTAIN HAS A SIXTH SENSE!

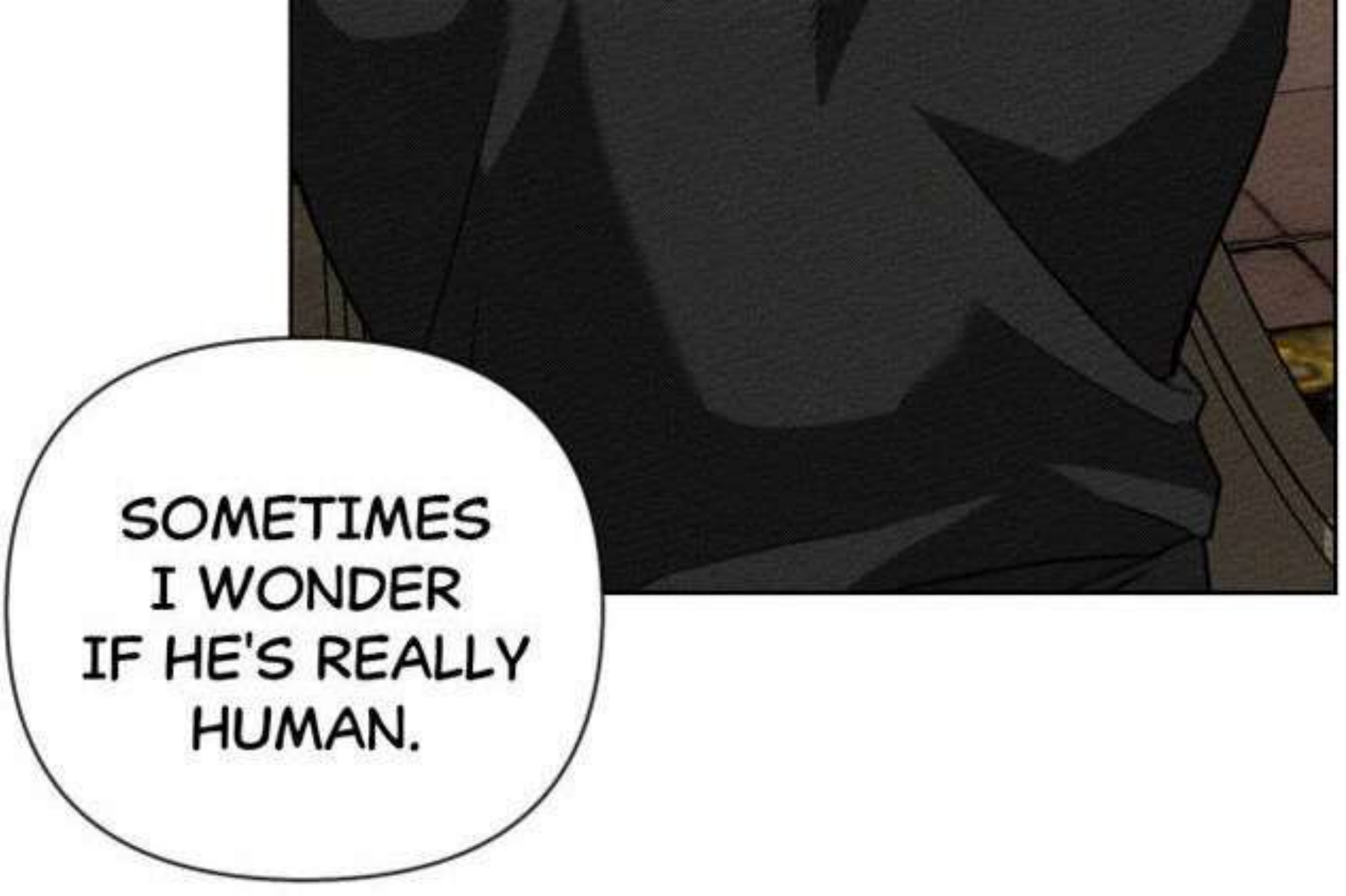
WE DEPART IN 3 DAYS. FEEL FREE TO GO FIRST IF YOU'VE GOT A PROBLEM WITH THAT.

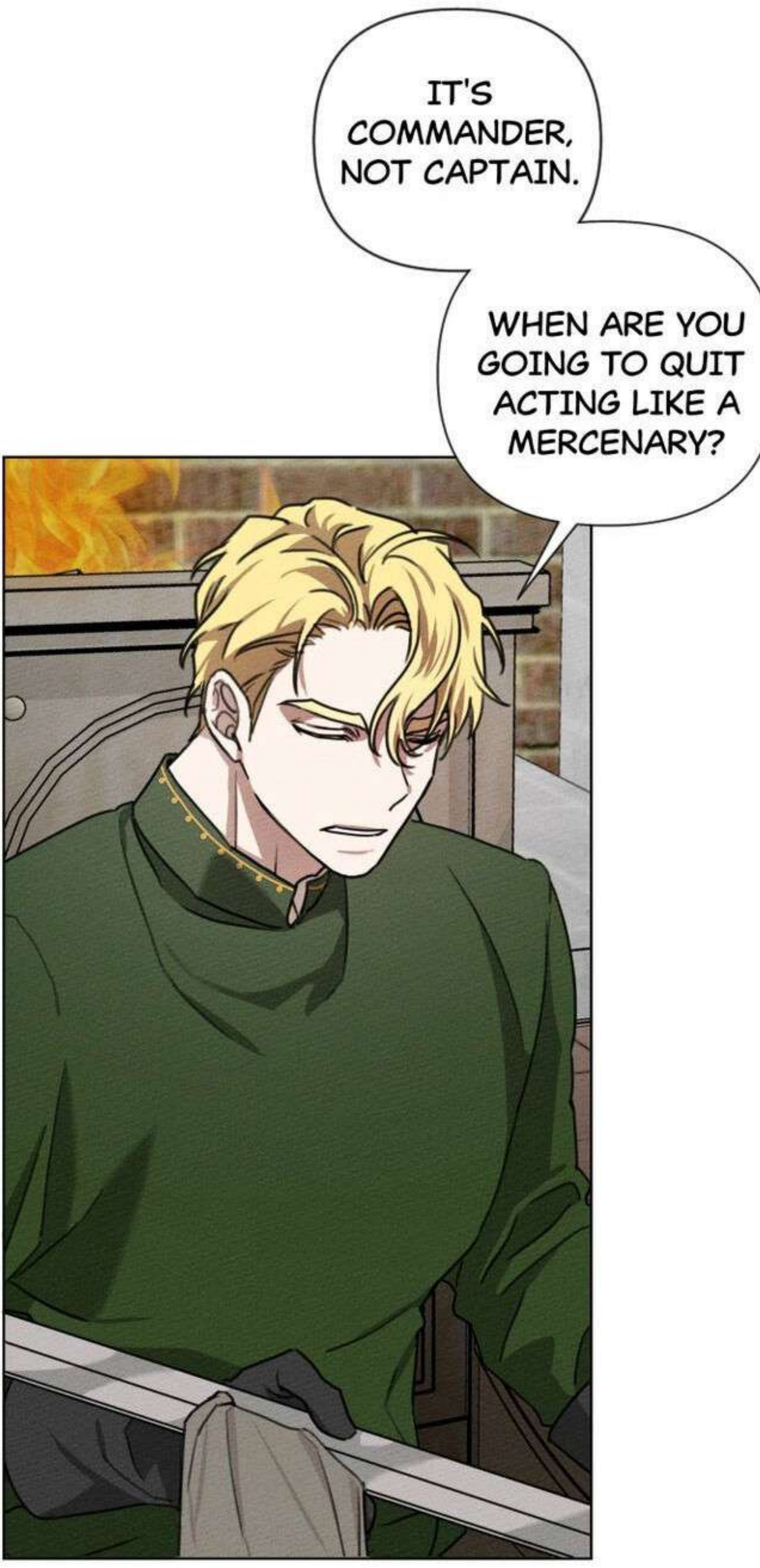
STERN

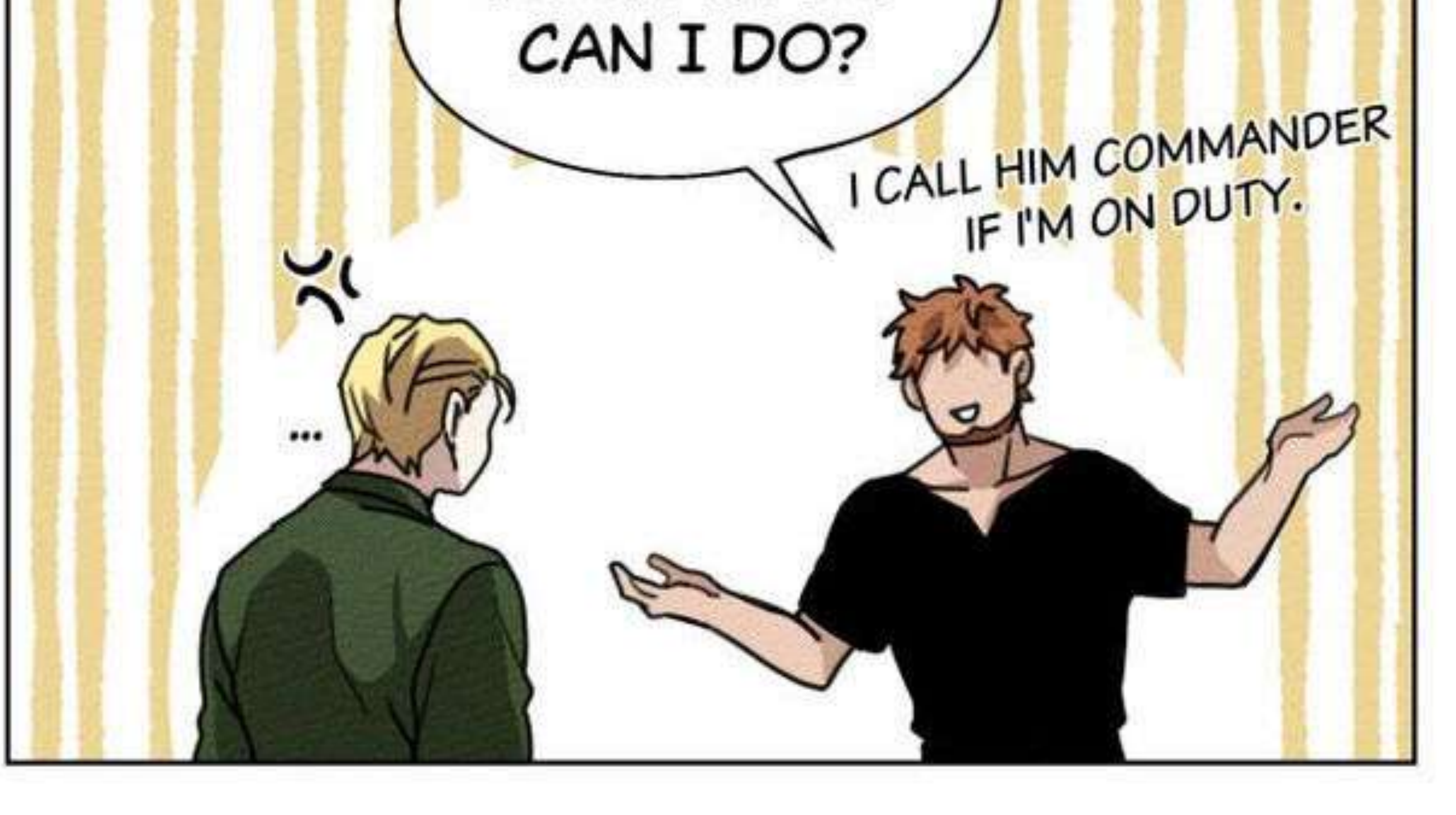

HAHAHA
HAHA
DIDN'T I SOUND JUST LIKE THE CAPTAIN THEN?


BUT WE MIGHT HAVE TO DELAY OUR DEPARTURE
IF THE RAIN DOESN'T STOP BY TOMORROW.
SIGH

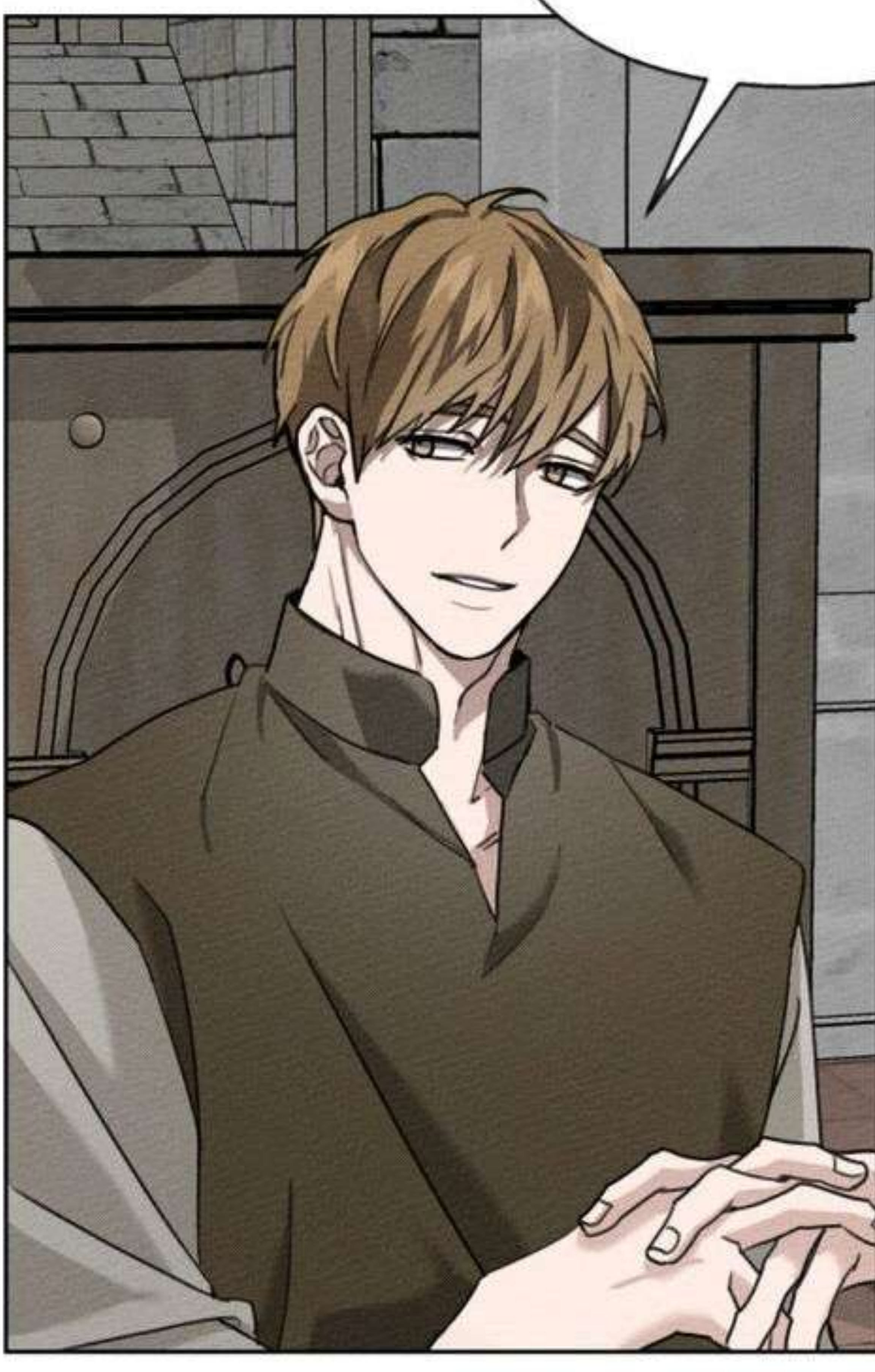

DON'T WORRY. THE CAPTAIN'S ALWAYS RIGHT ABOUT THE WEATHER.
RIGHT?

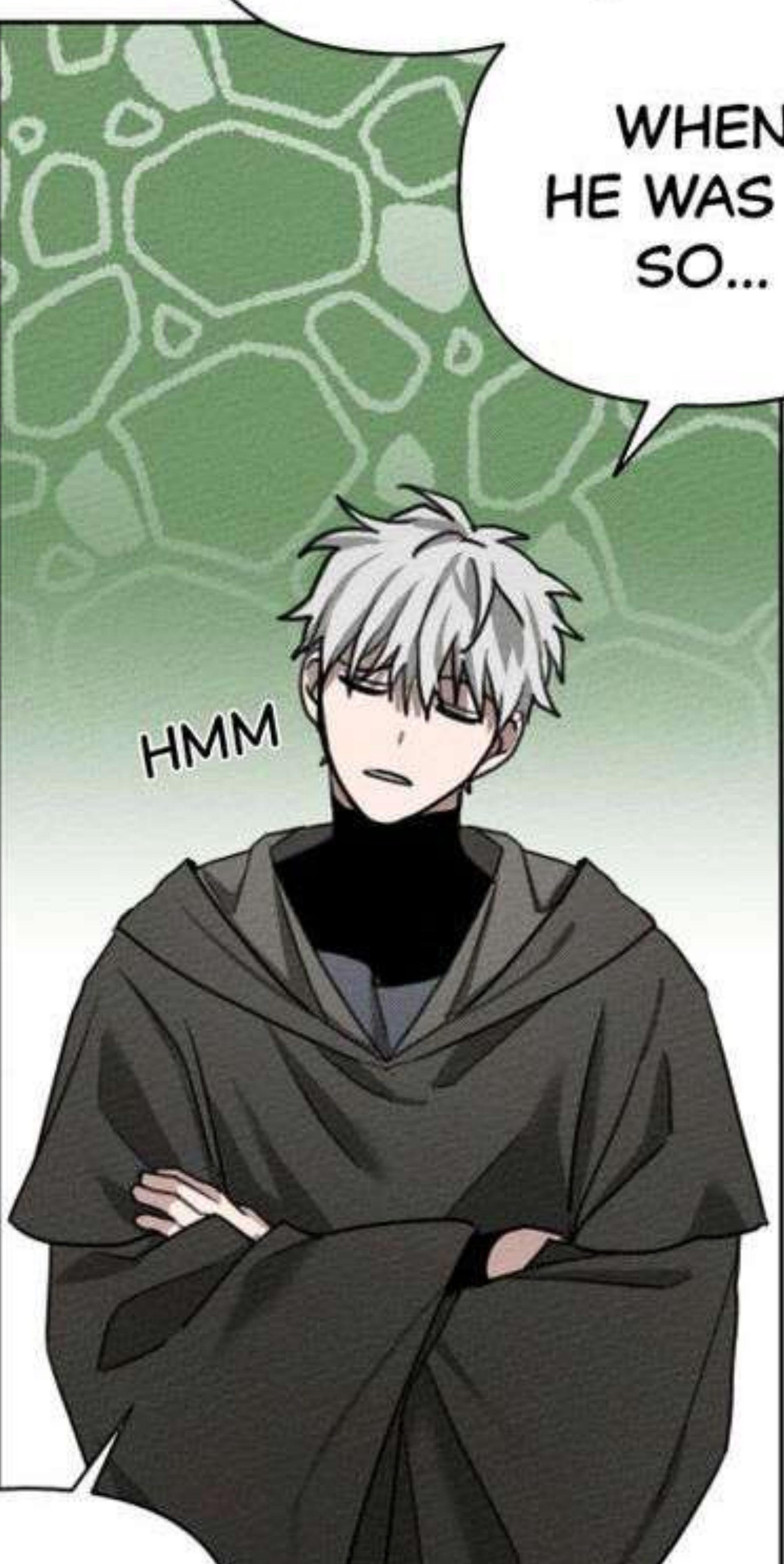

SOMETIMES I WONDER IF HE'S REALLY HUMAN.

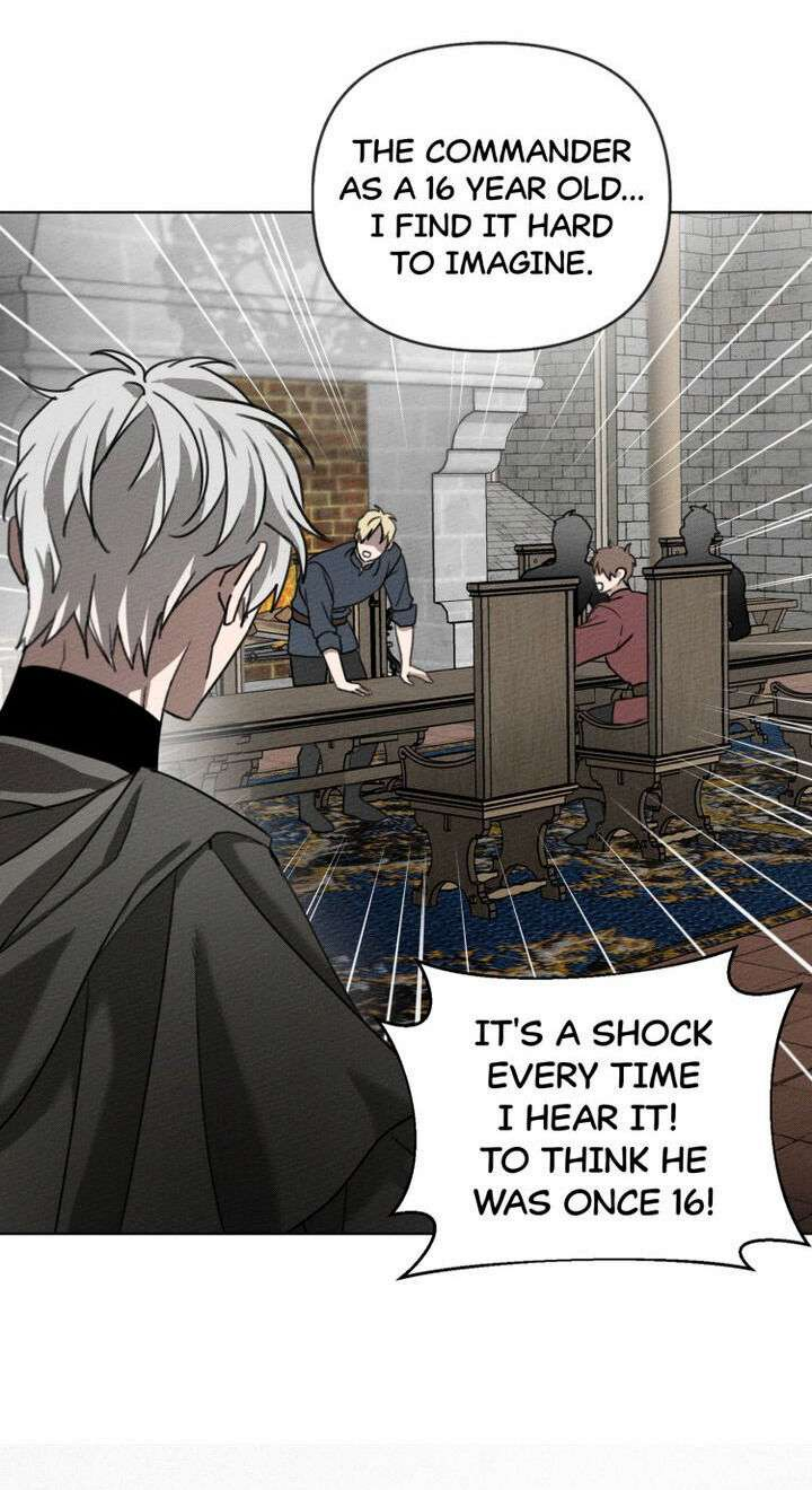

IT'S COMMANDER, NOT CAPTAIN.
WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO QUIT ACTING LIKE A MERCENARY?


IT'S A HABIT NOW. WHAT CAN I DO?
I CALL HIM COMMANDER IF I'M ON DUTY.
...

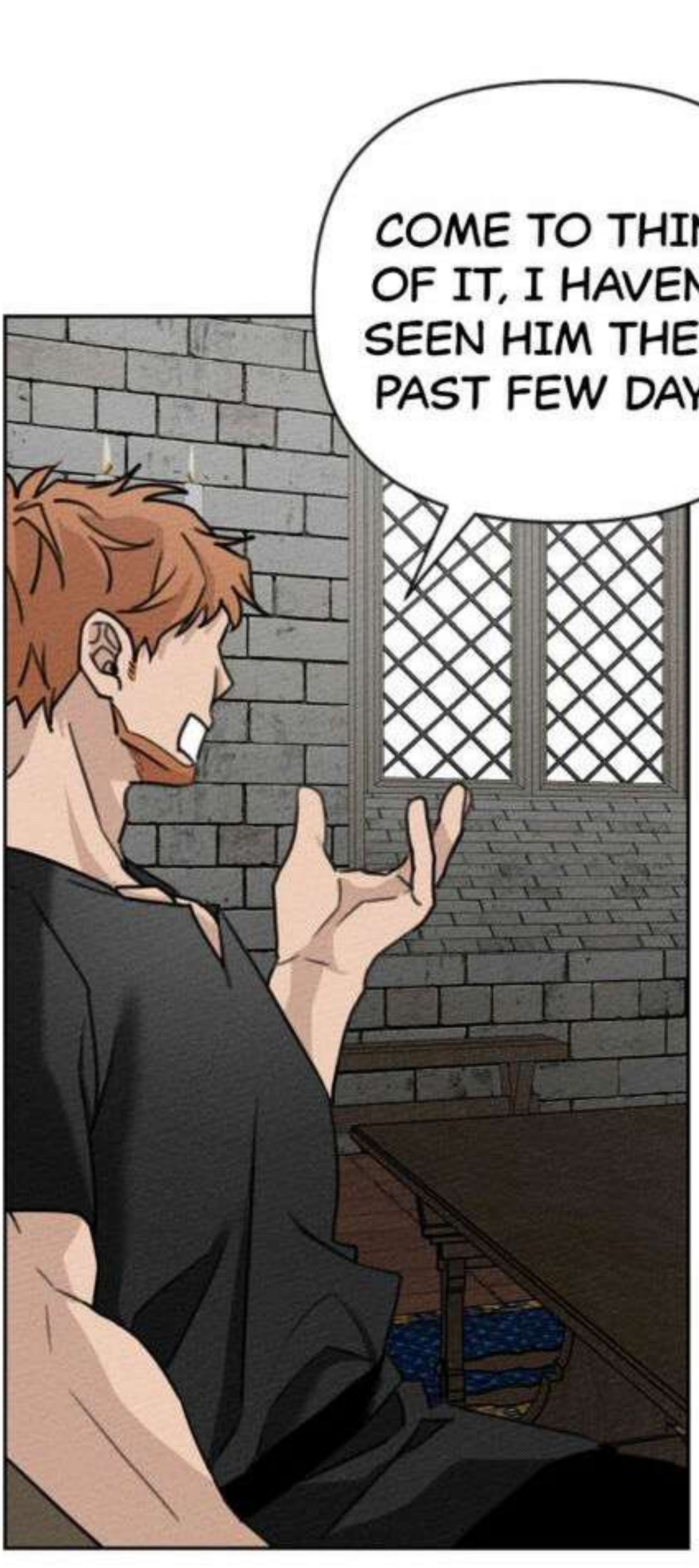
HEY, SORCERER. WHAT DO YOU THINK?
DO YOU THINK THE CAPTAIN'S ACTUALLY DESCENDED FROM A SUPERNATURAL BEING?
CLUNK
HAA...
STOP TALKING NONSENSE.

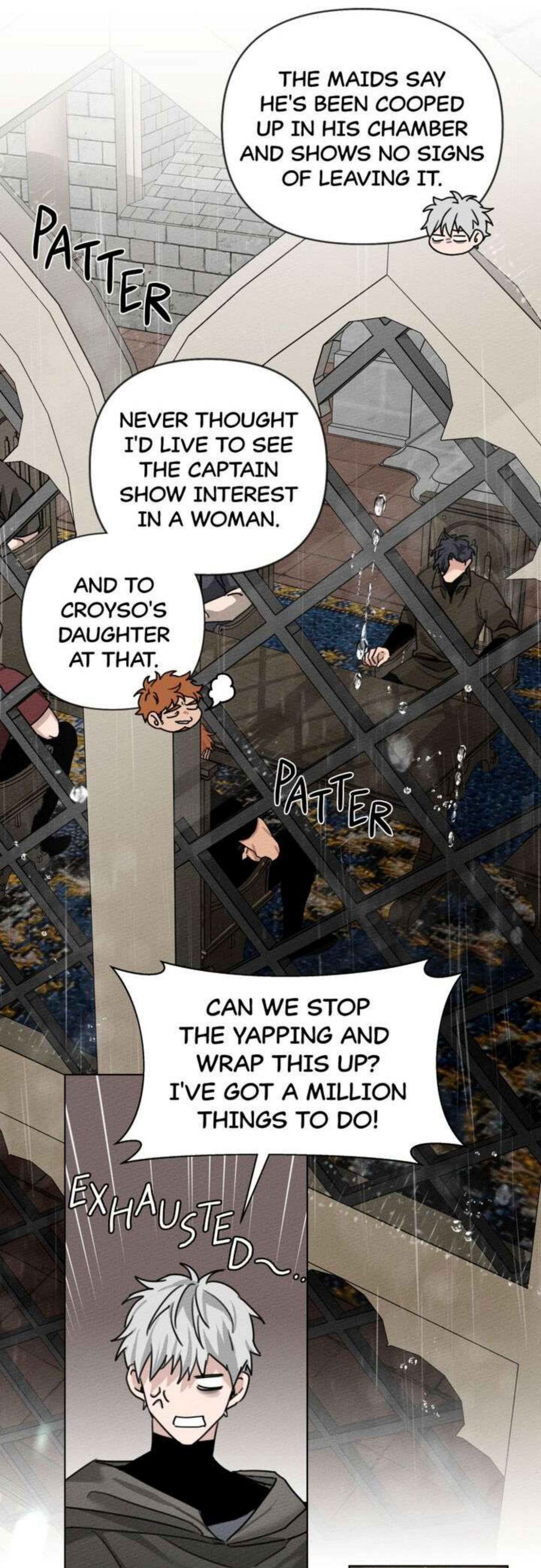

YOU'LL BE DIGGING YOUR OWN GRAVE
IF YOU SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT IN FRONT OF THE CAPTAIN EVEN AS A JOKE.
IF I RECALL, YOU WERE WITH THE COMMANDER EVEN BEFORE HE JOINED THE ORDER, WEREN'T YOU?

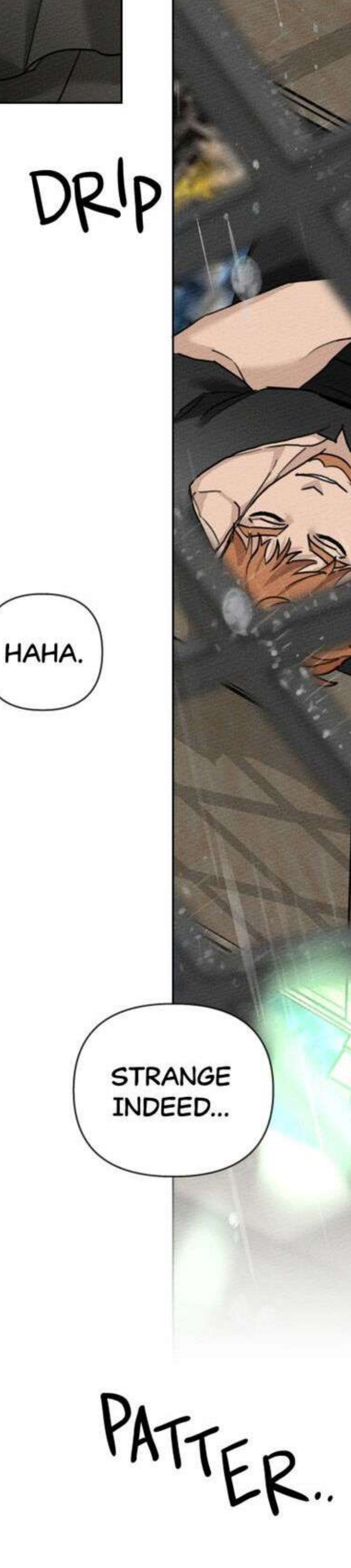

I FIRST MET HIM
WHEN HE WAS 16, SO...
HMM
IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU'D KNOWN HIM SINCE HE WAS SO YOUNG.

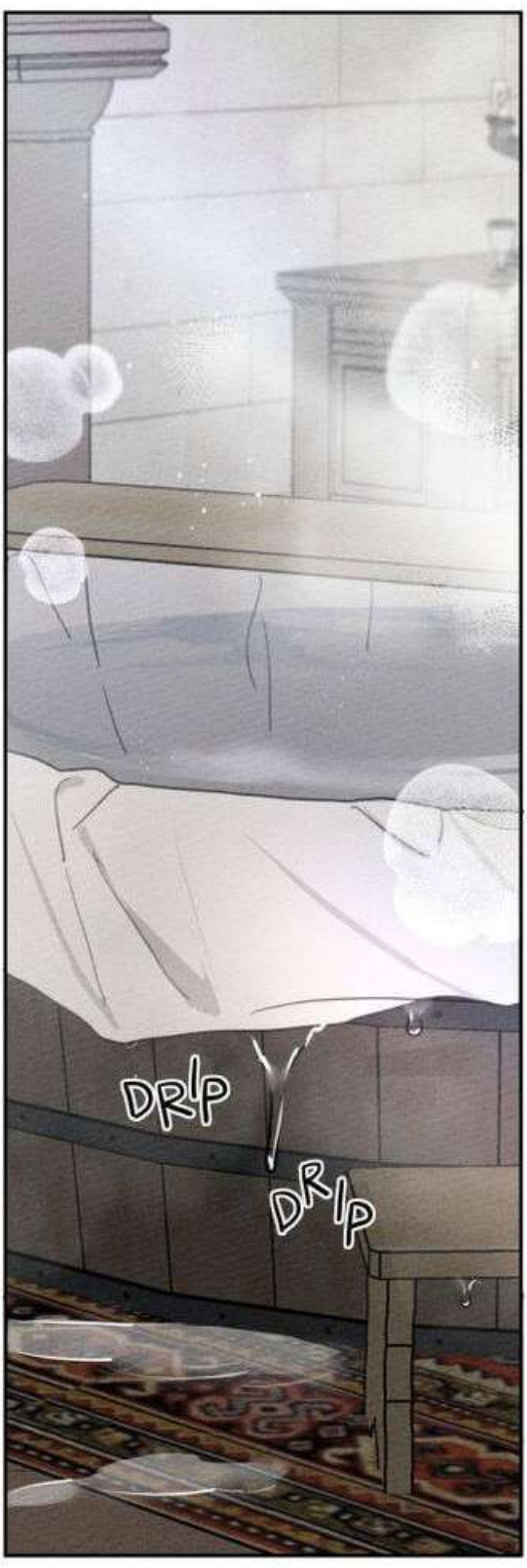

THE COMMANDER AS A 16 YEAR OLD... I FIND IT HARD TO IMAGINE.
IT'S A SHOCK EVERY TIME I HEAR IT! TO THINK HE WAS ONCE 16!

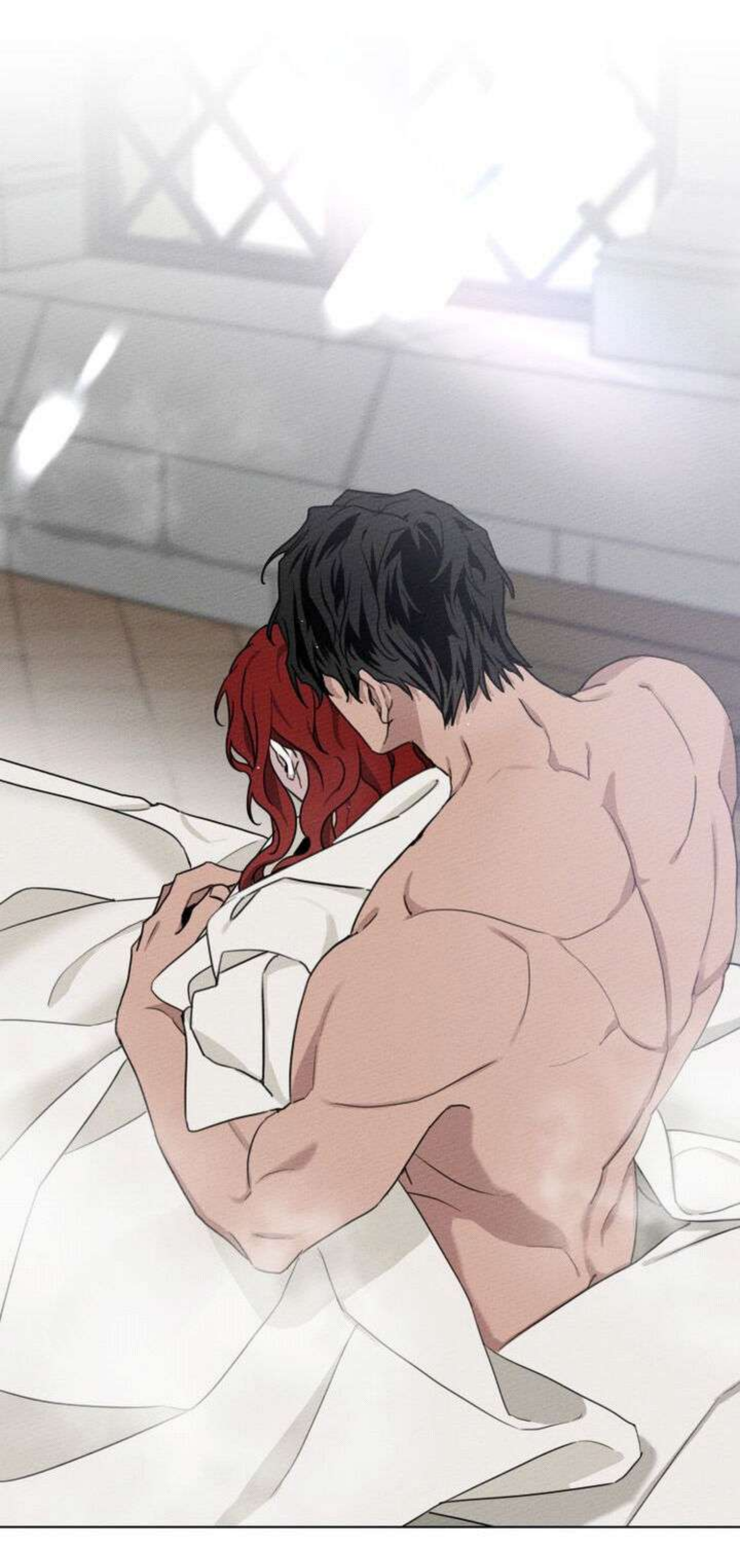
WELL, HE WASN'T MUCH DIFFERENT BACK THEN.
NO, HE WAS ACTUALLY MORE RECKLESS AND AGGRESSIVE. LIKE A MAN WITH NOTHING TO LOSE.

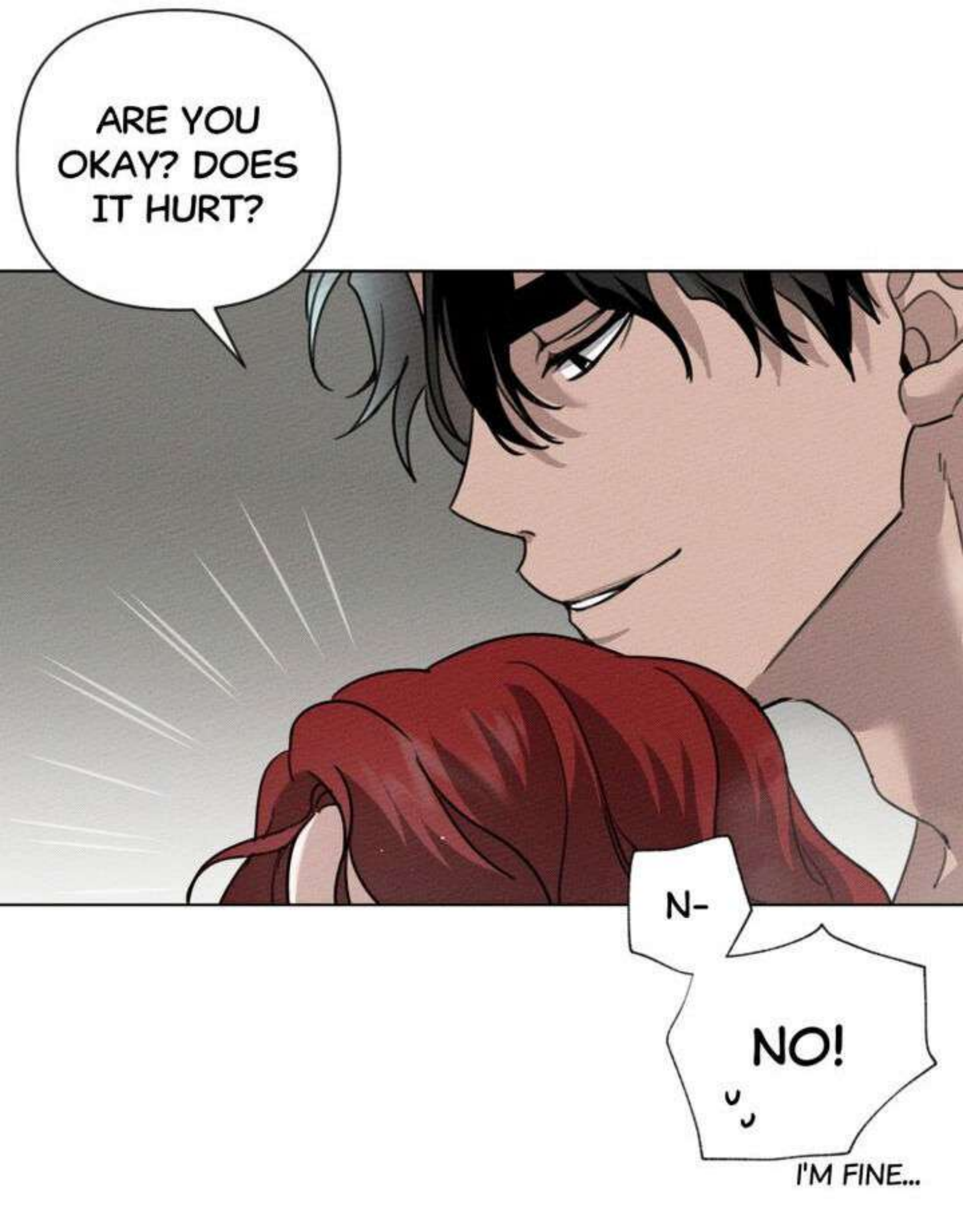

COME TO THINK OF IT, I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM THESE PAST FEW DAYS.

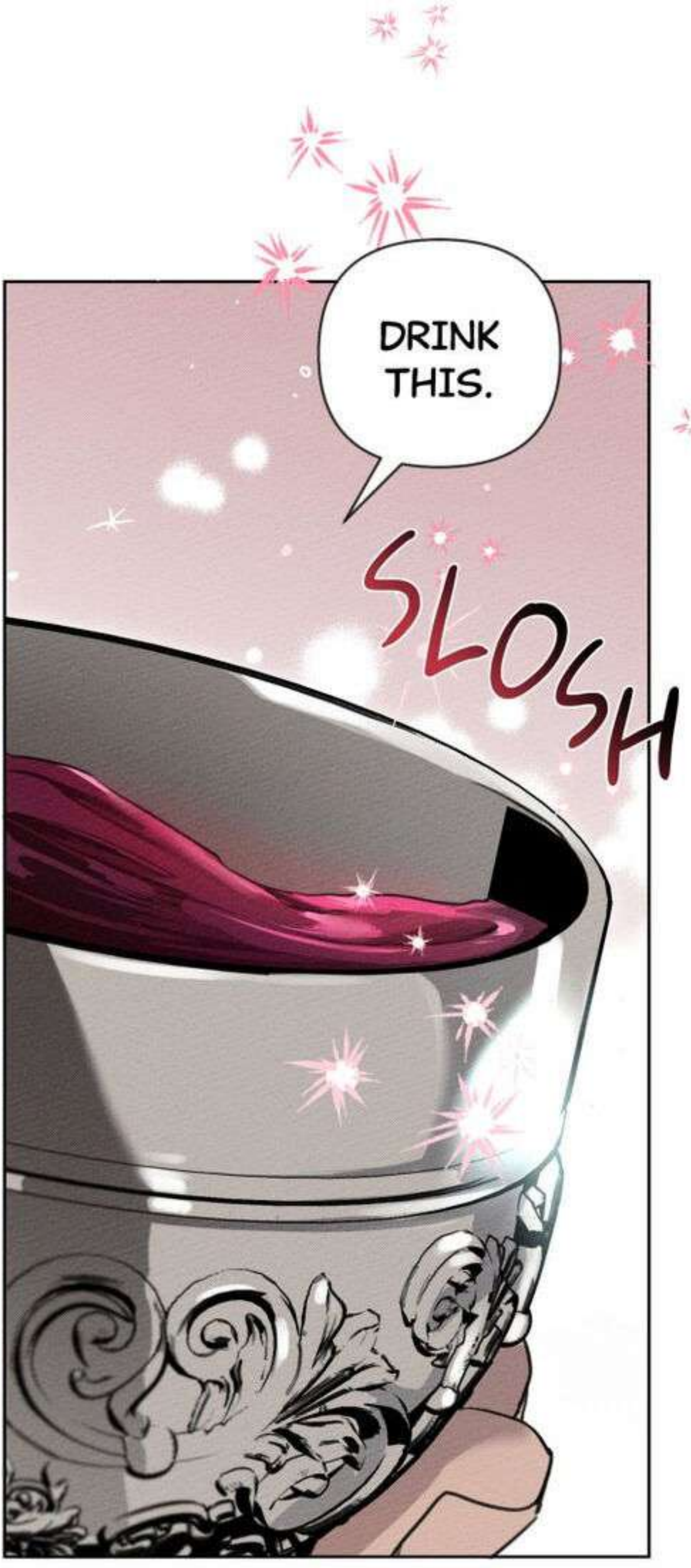

THE MAIDS SAY HE'S BEEN COOPED UP IN HIS CHAMBER AND SHOWS NO SIGNS OF LEAVING IT.
PATTER
NEVER THOUGHT I'D LIVE TO SEE THE CAPTAIN SHOW INTEREST IN A WOMAN.
AND TO CROYSO'S DAUGHTER AT THAT.
PATTER
CAN WE STOP THE YAPPING AND WRAP THIS UP? I'VE GOT A MILLION THINGS TO DO!
EXHAUSTED~..

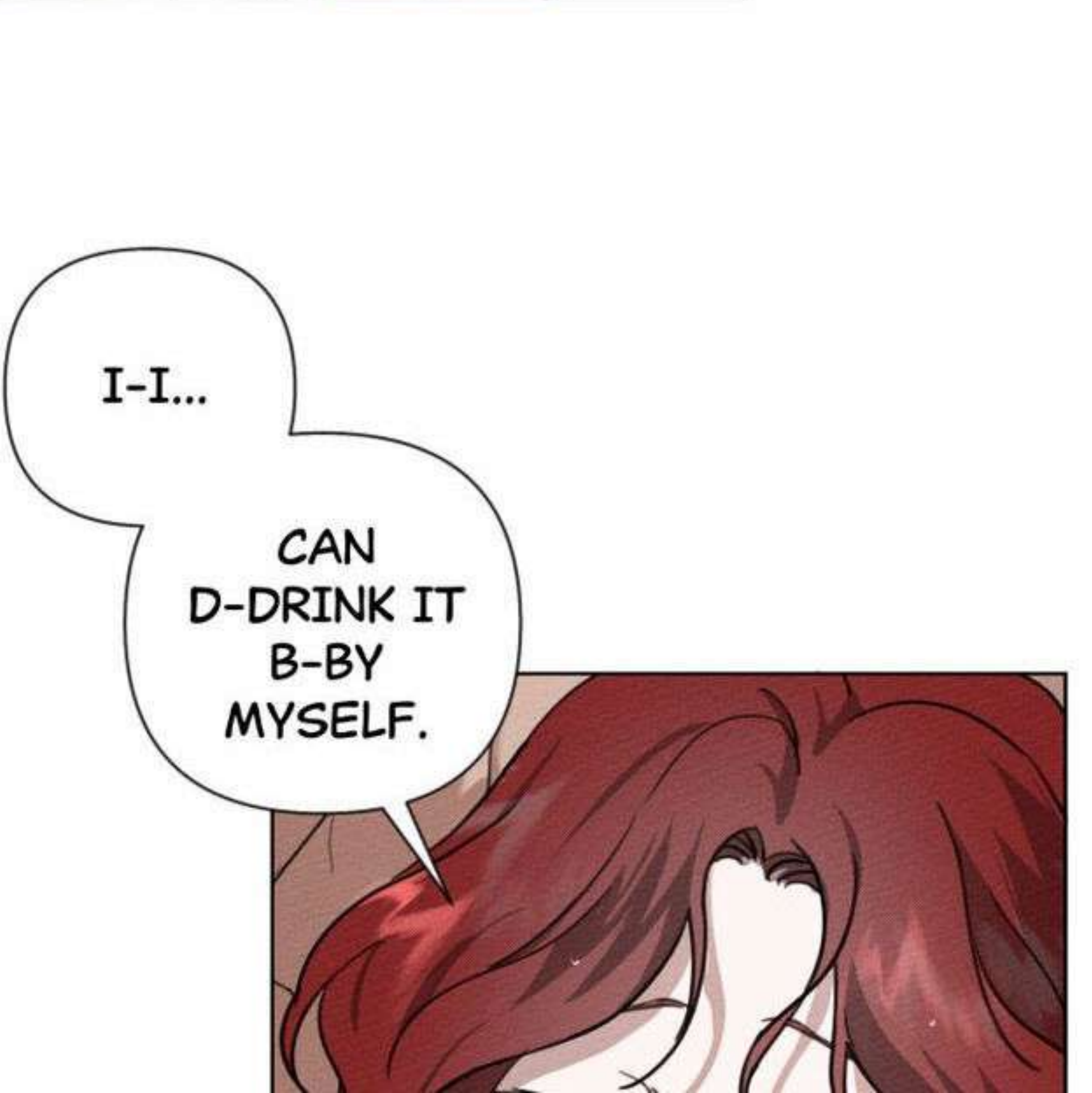

DRIP
HAHA.
STRANGE INDEED...
PATTER..

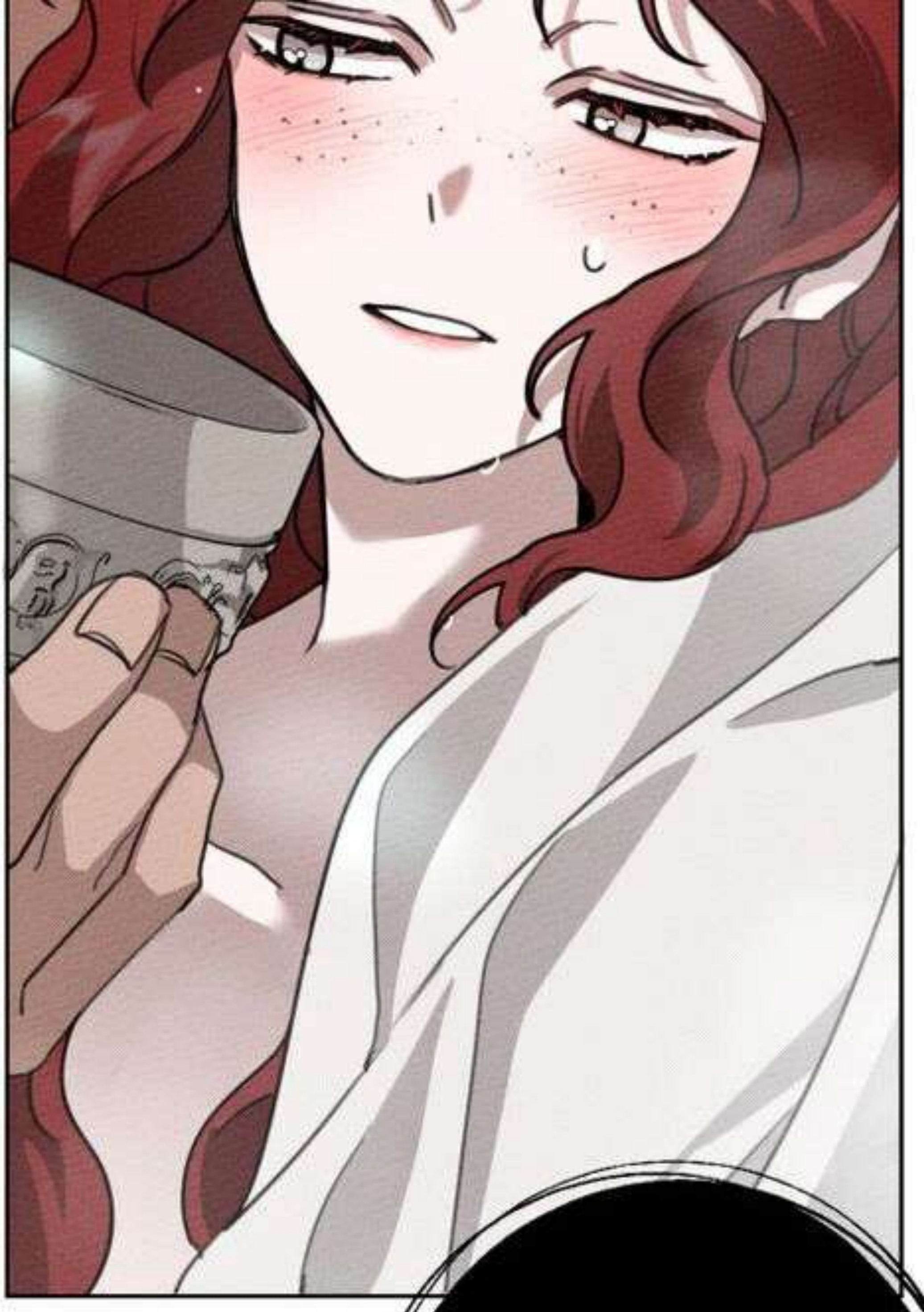

DRIP
DRIP

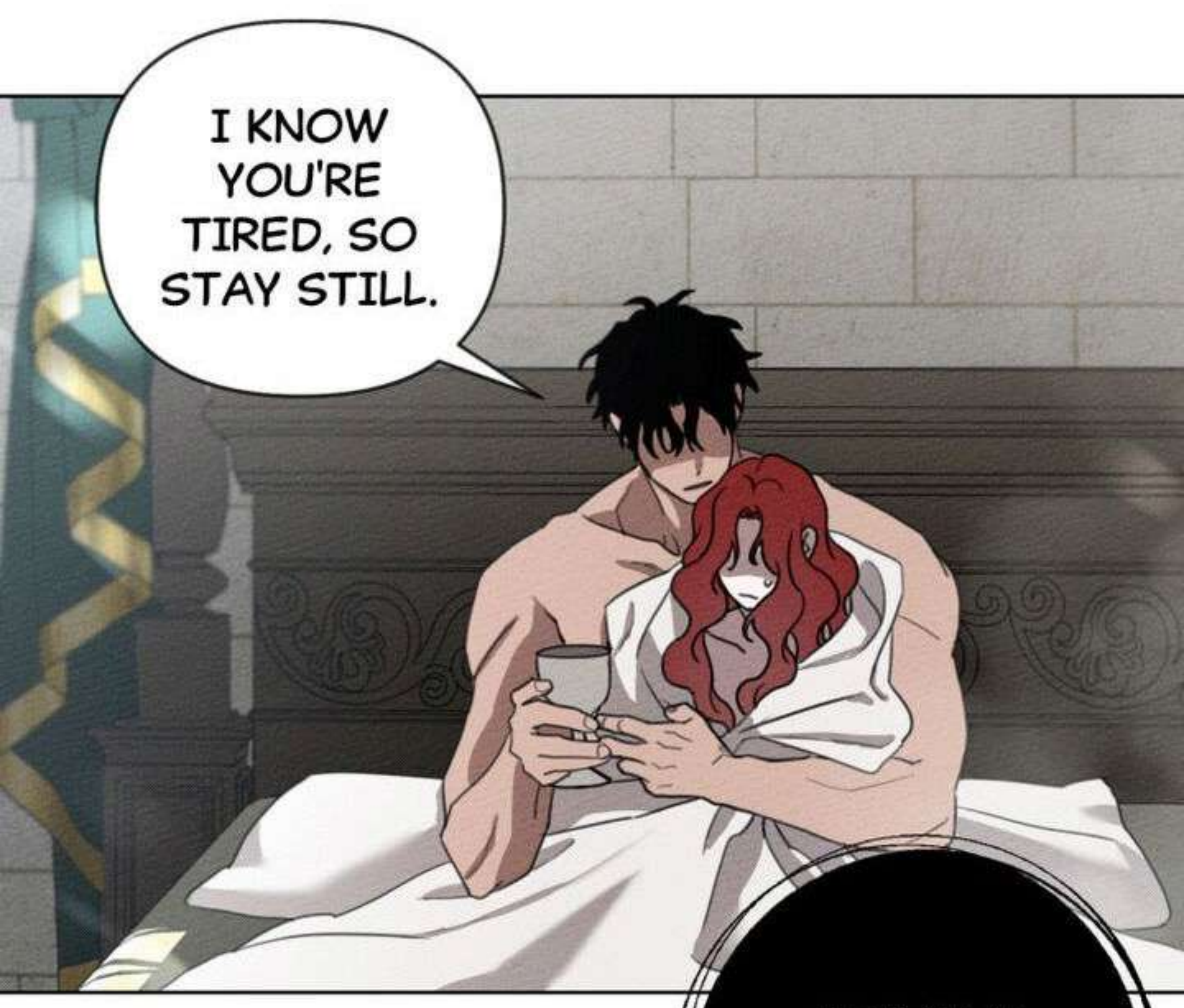


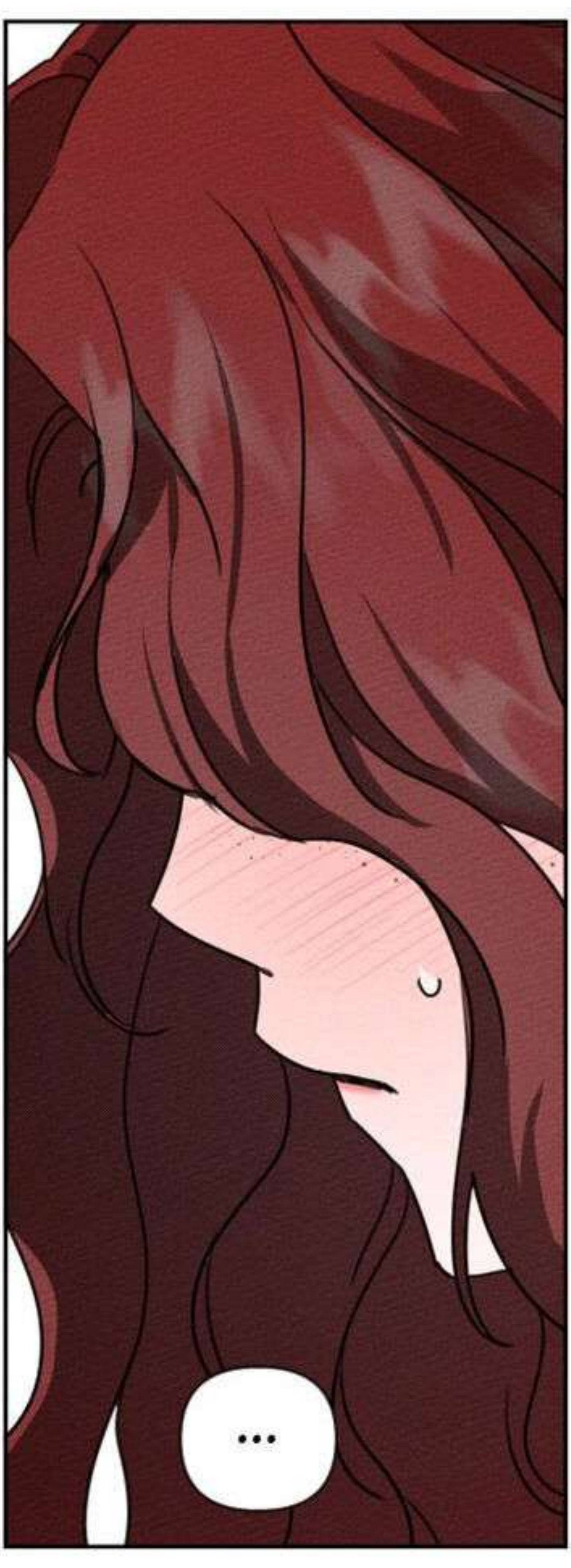

ARE YOU OKAY? DOES IT HURT?
N-
NO!
I'M FINE...

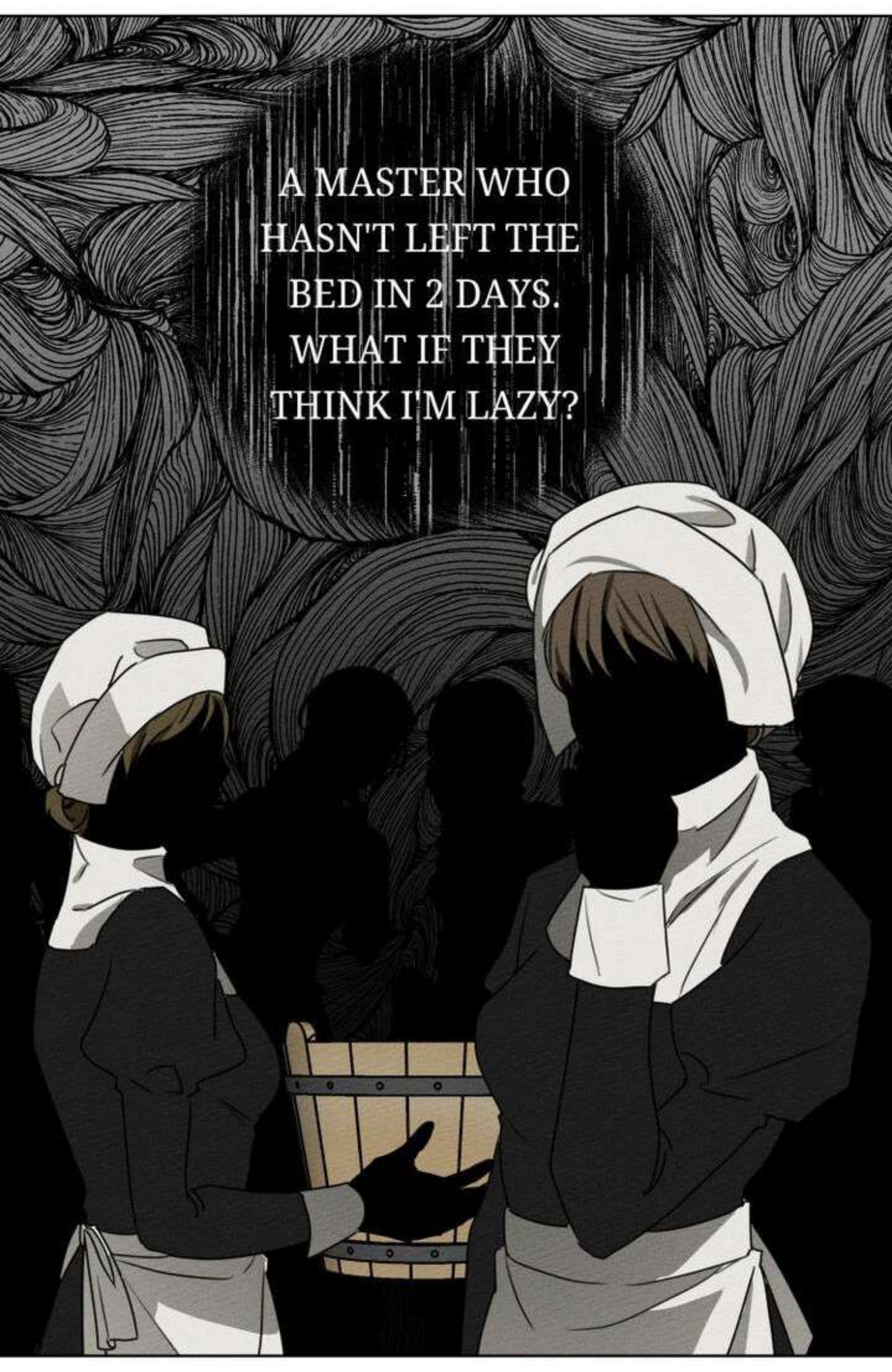

DRINK THIS.
SLOSH

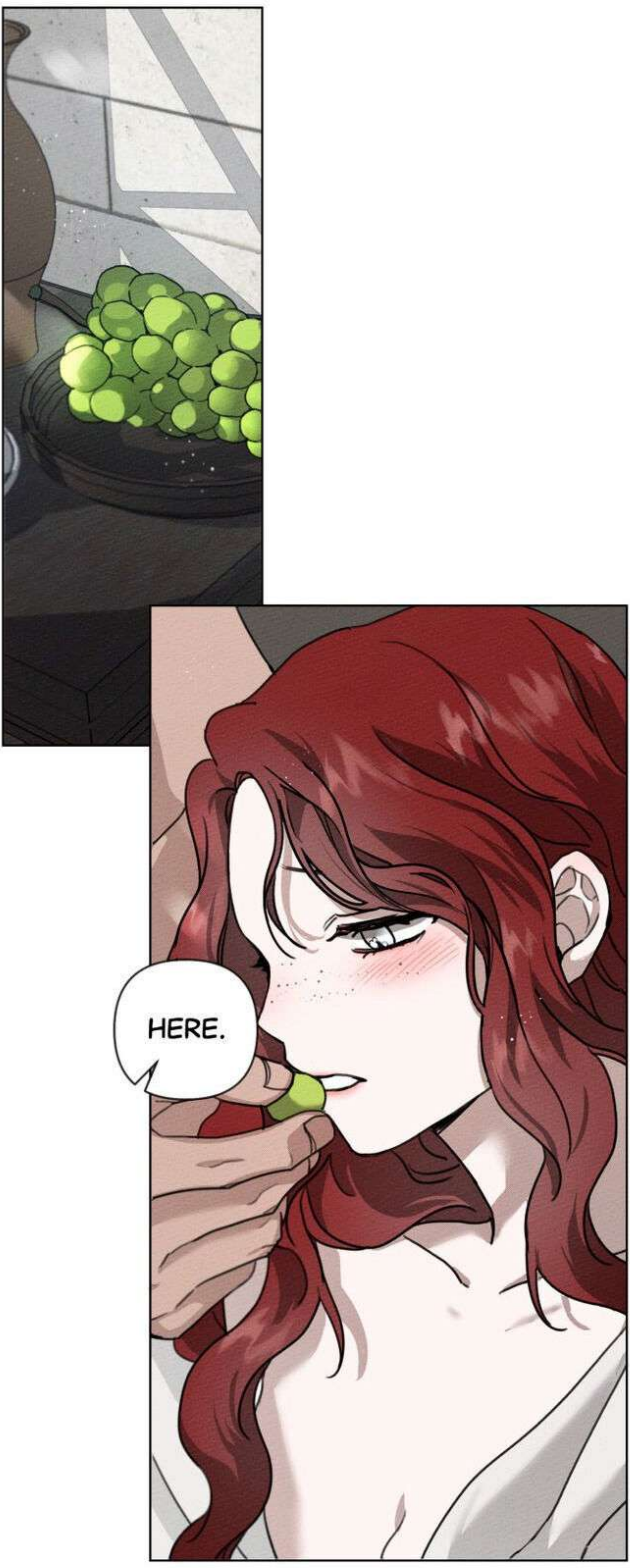

I-I...
CAN D-DRINK IT B-BY MYSELF.

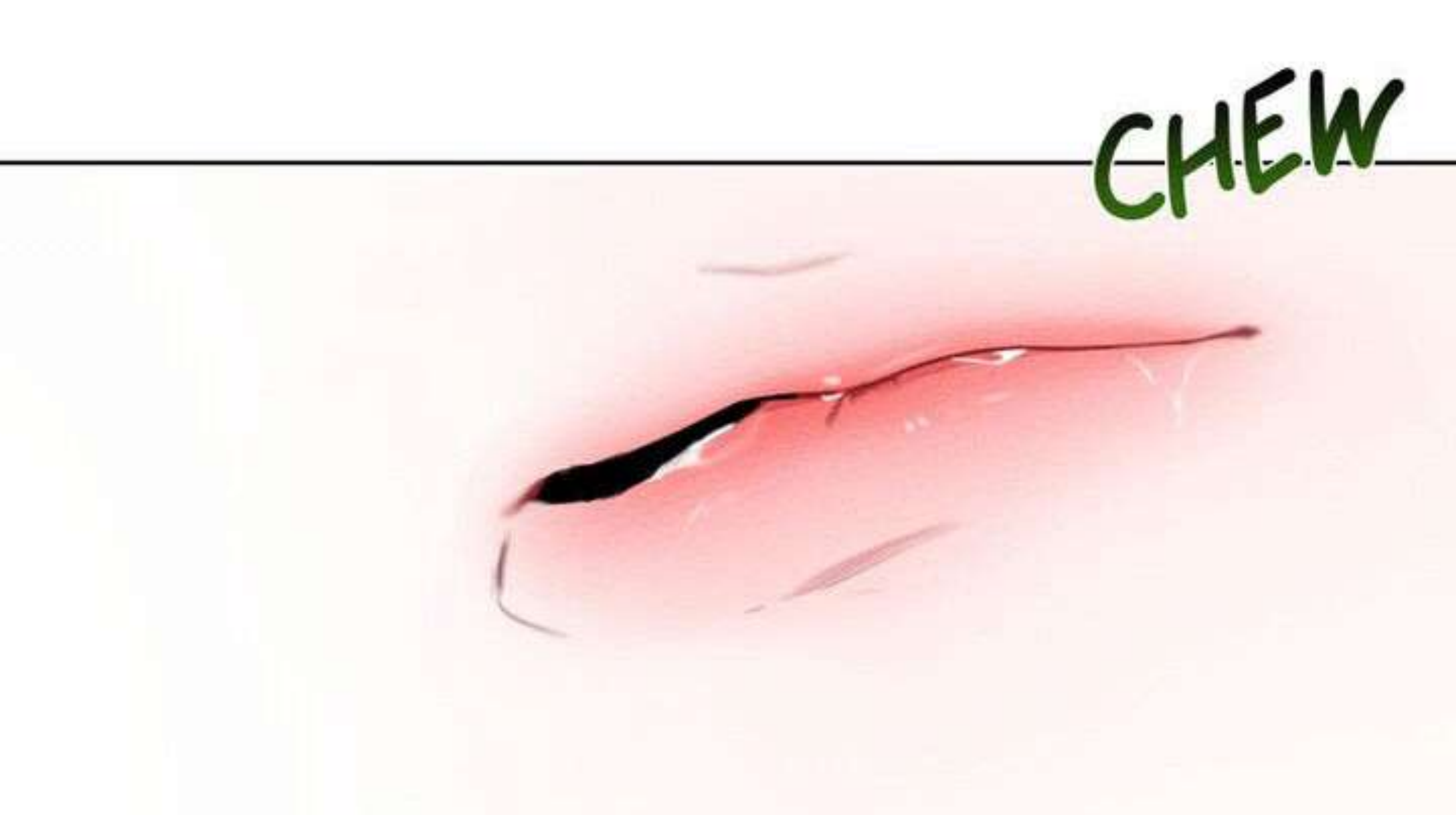

I WONDER HOW HE REALLY THINKS OF ME.

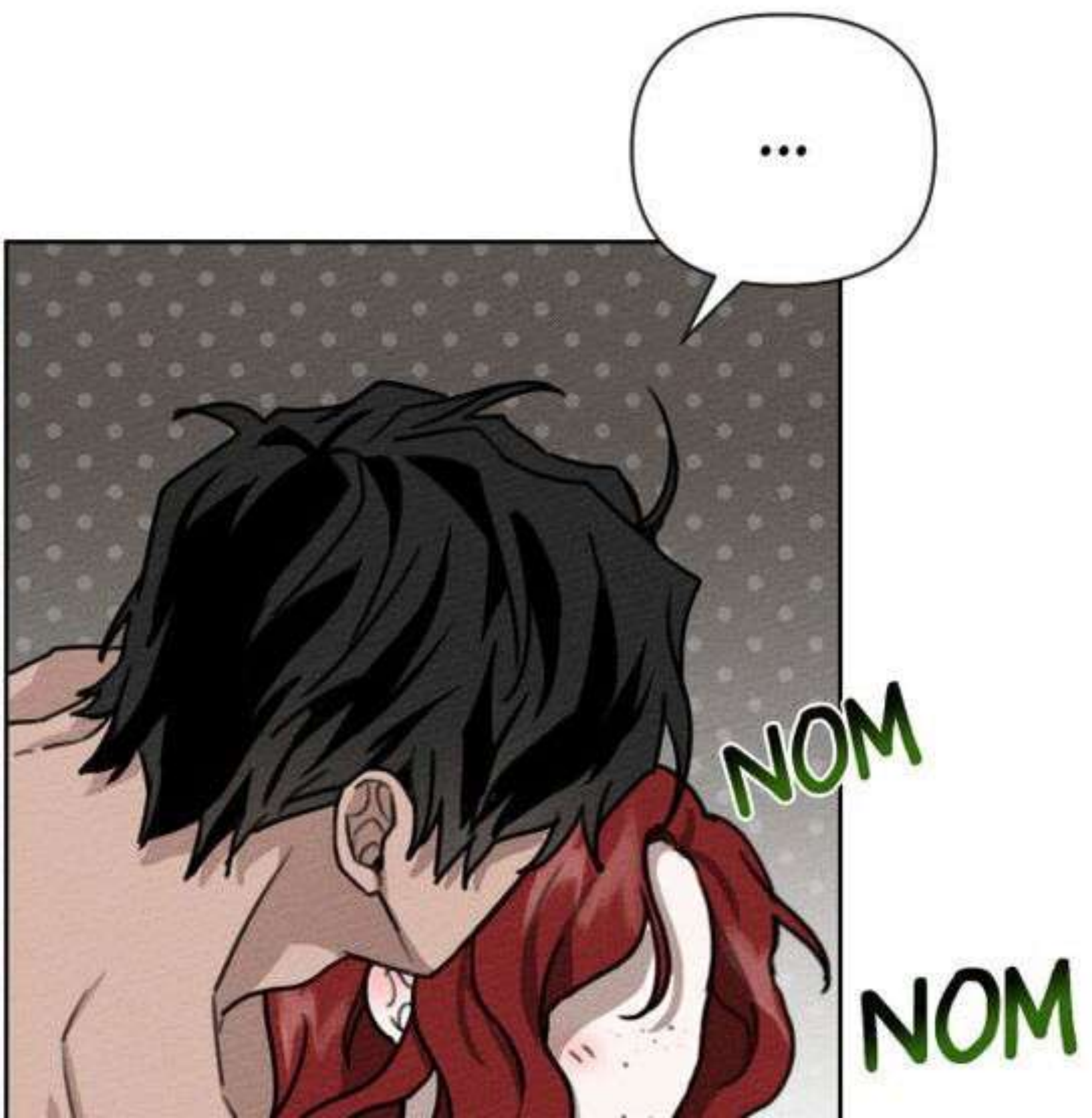

I KNOW YOU'RE TIRED, SO STAY STILL.
I REALLY AM TOO TIRED TO MOVE,
BUT IS IT ALL RIGHT TO BE LIKE THIS?

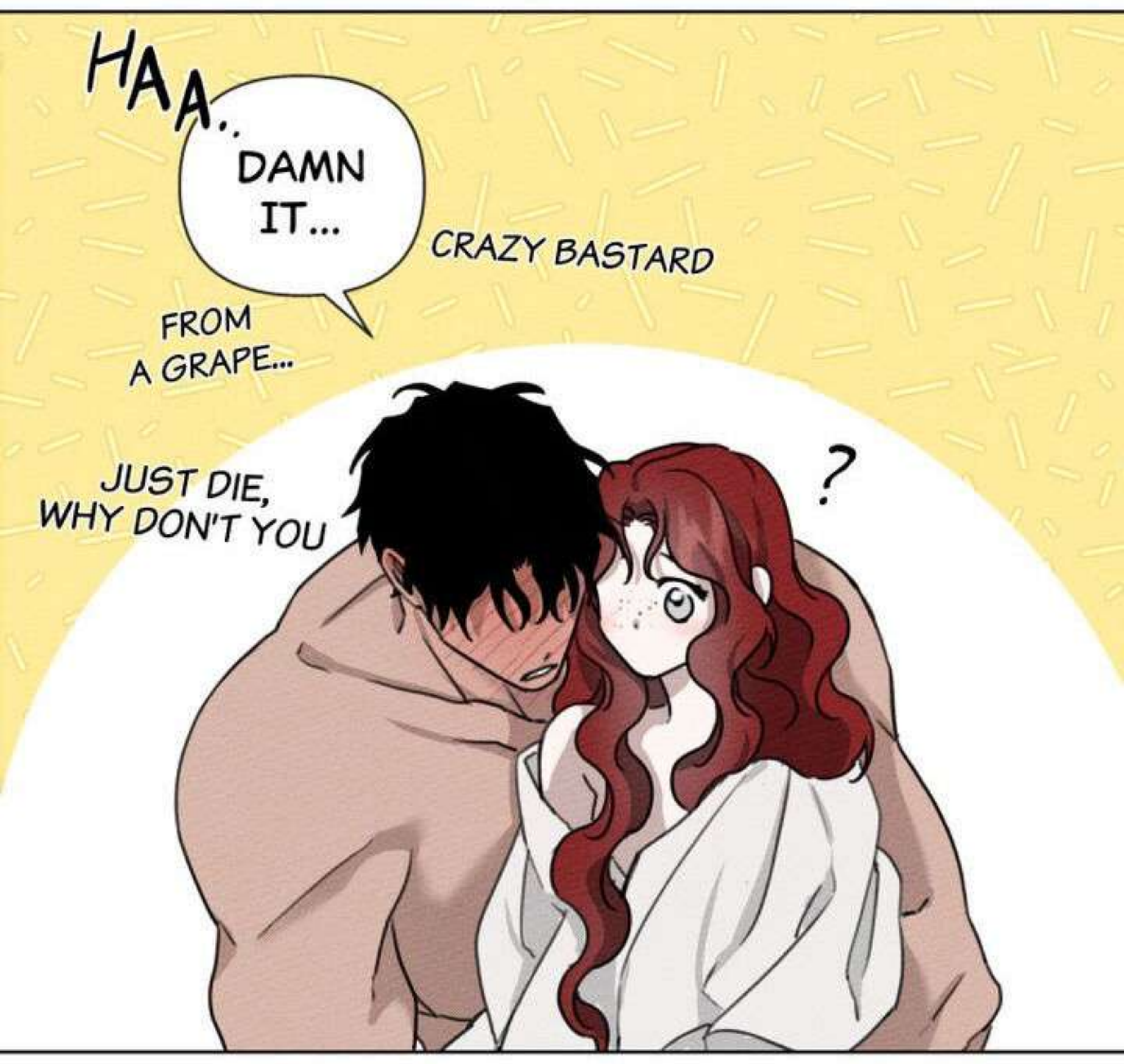

...

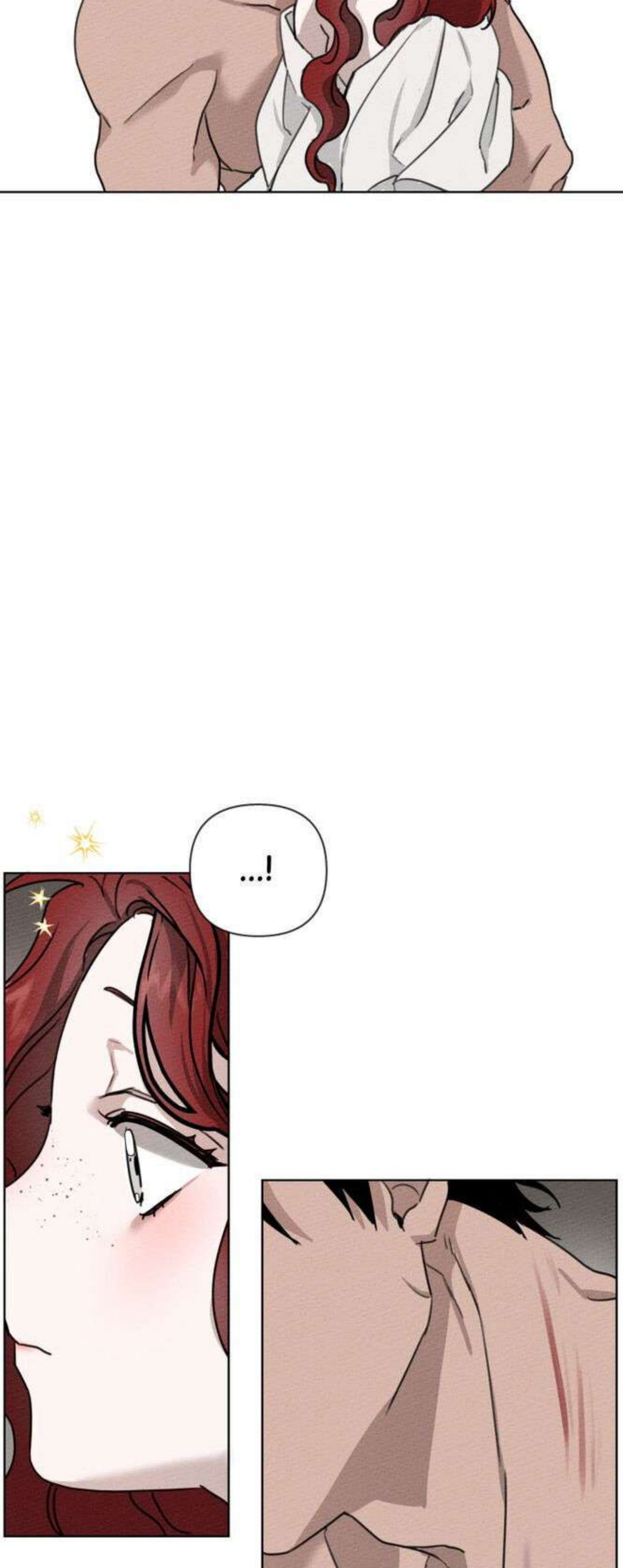

A MASTER WHO HASN'T LEFT THE BED IN 2 DAYS. WHAT IF THEY THINK I'M LAZY?

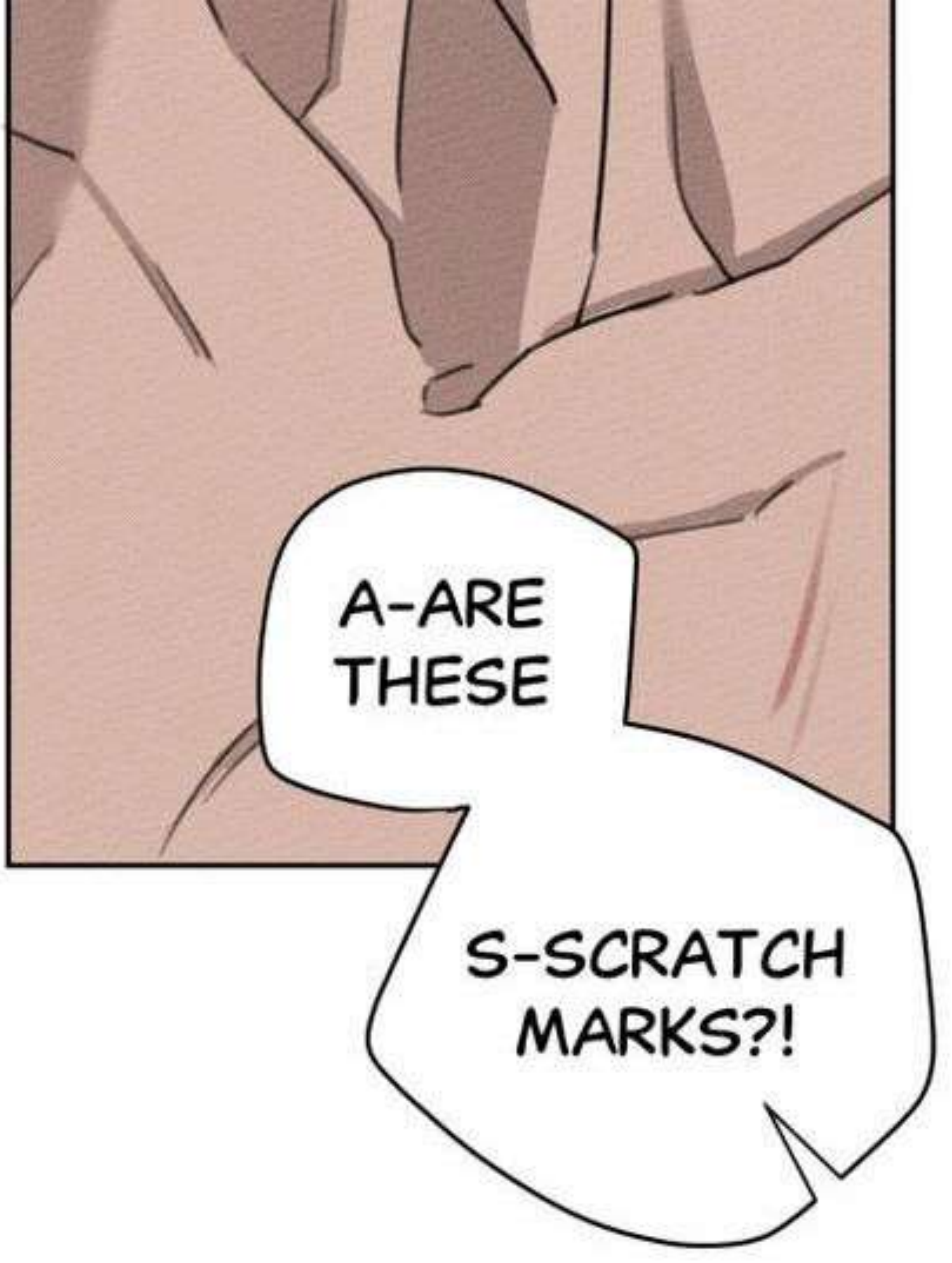

HERE.

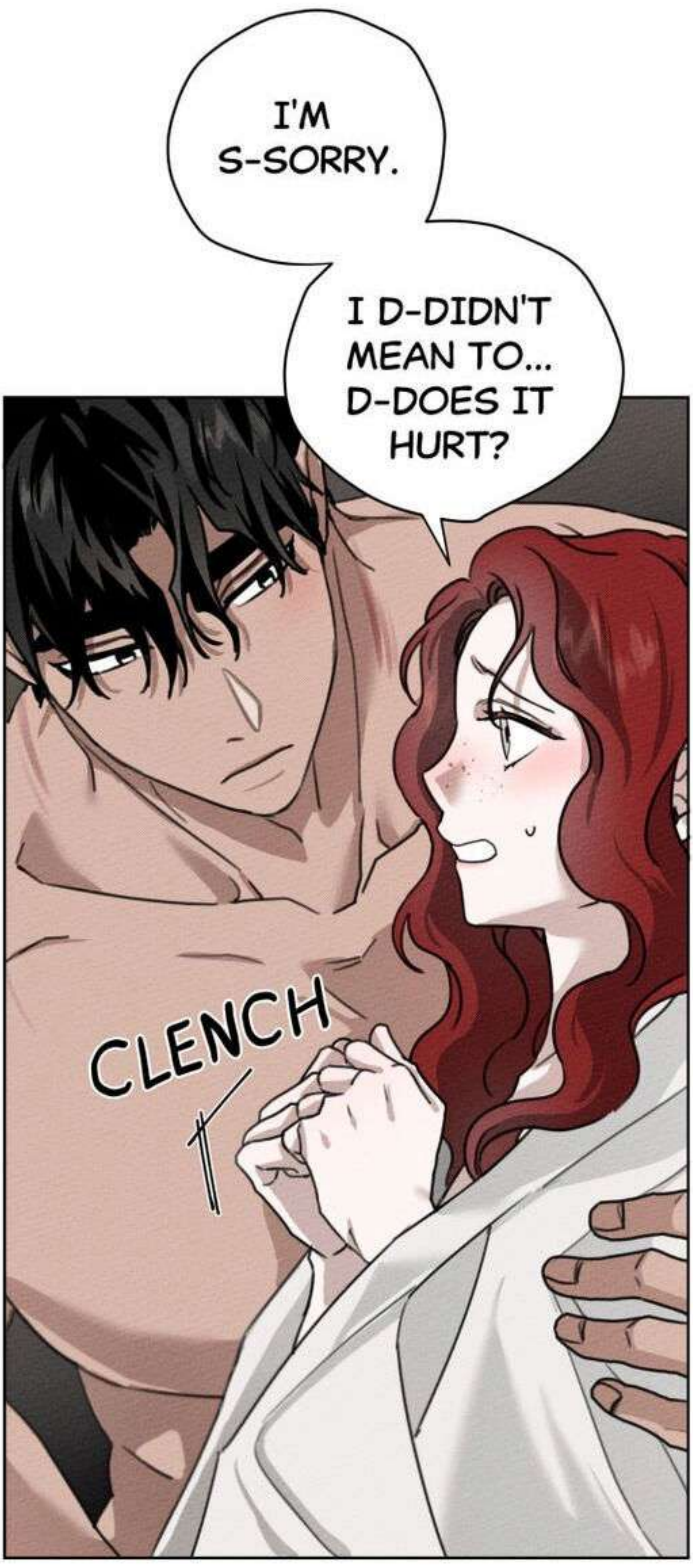

CHEW

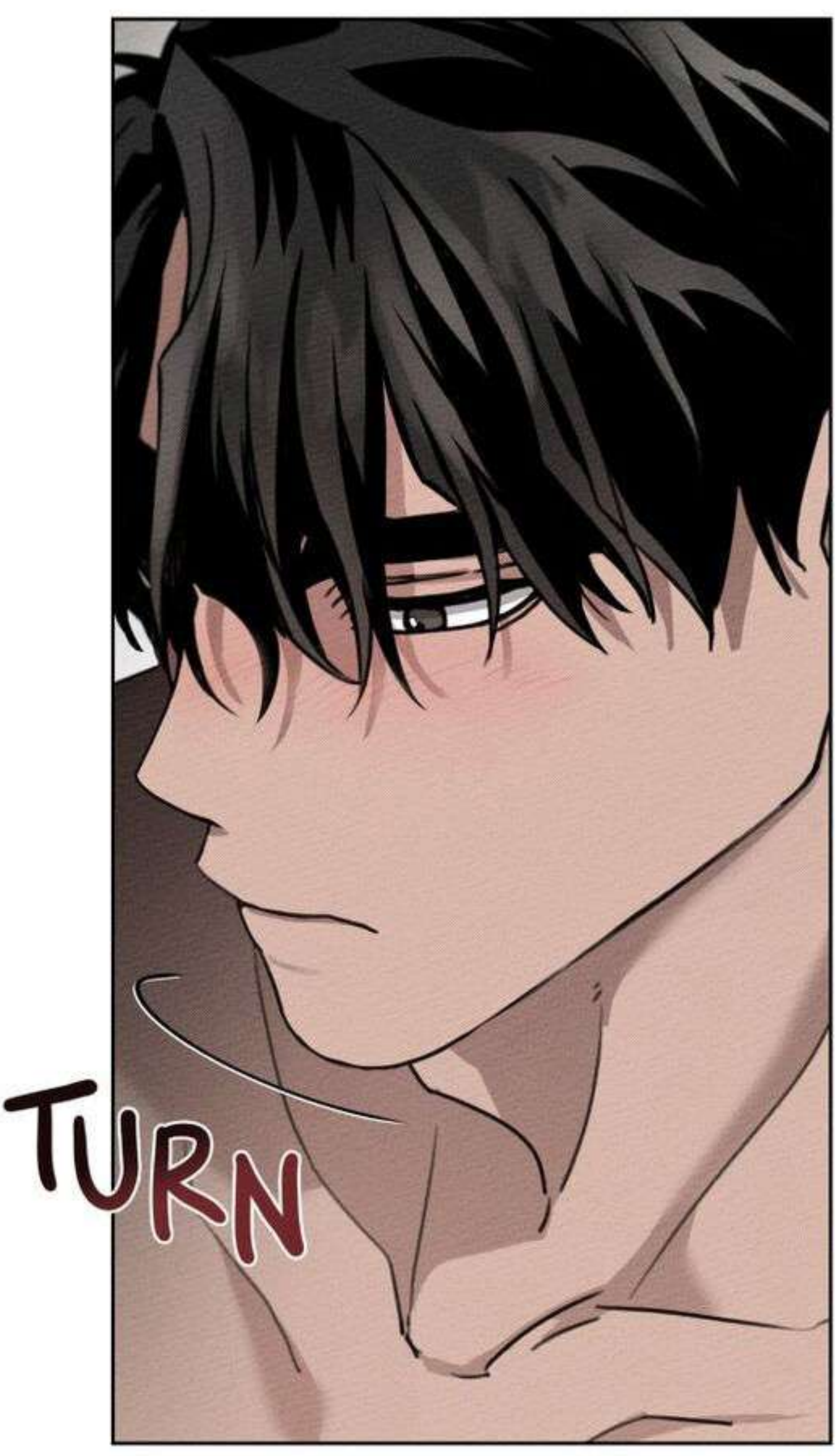

...
NOM
NOM

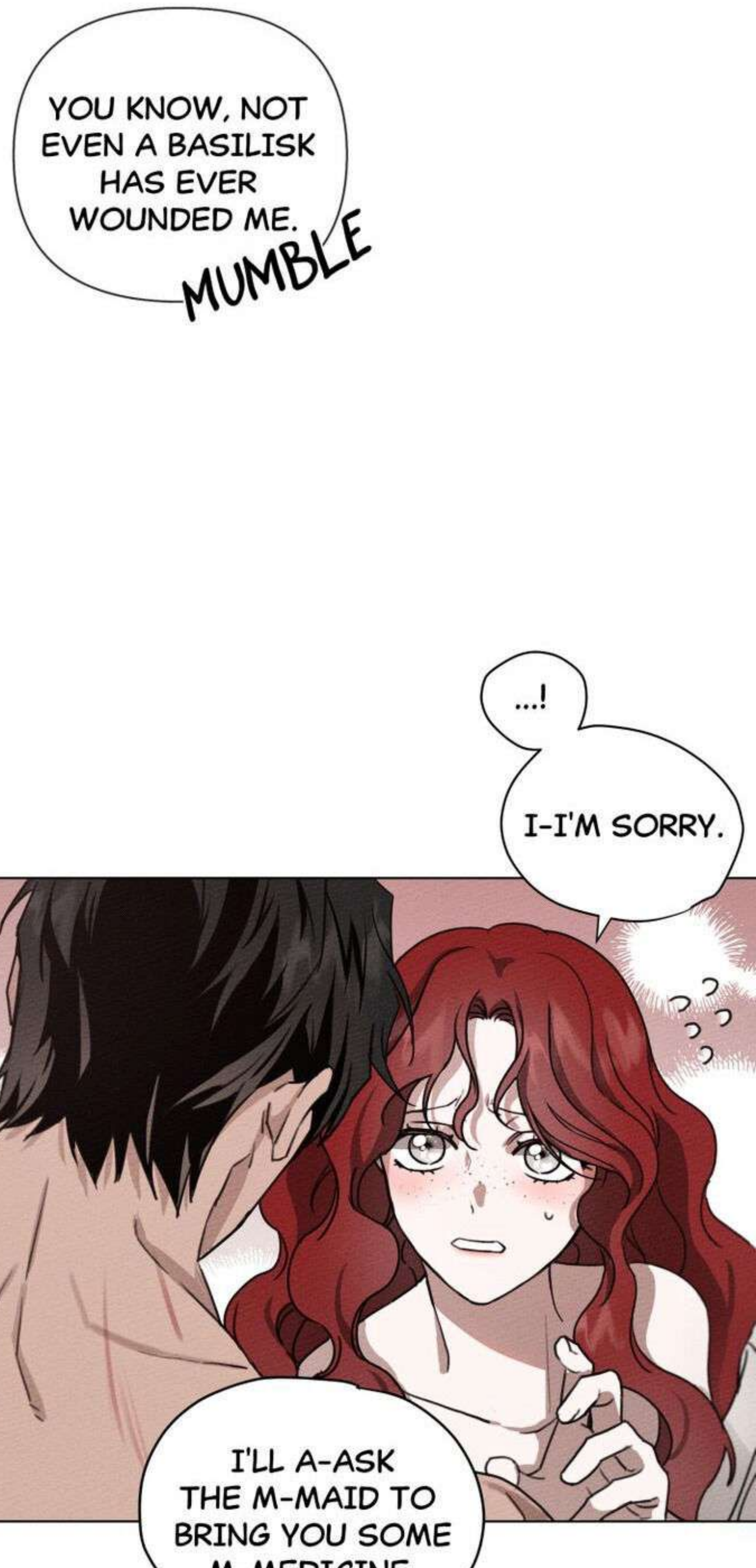

HAA..
DAMN IT...
FROM A GRAPE...
CRAZY BASTARD
JUST DIE, WHY DON'T YOU
?

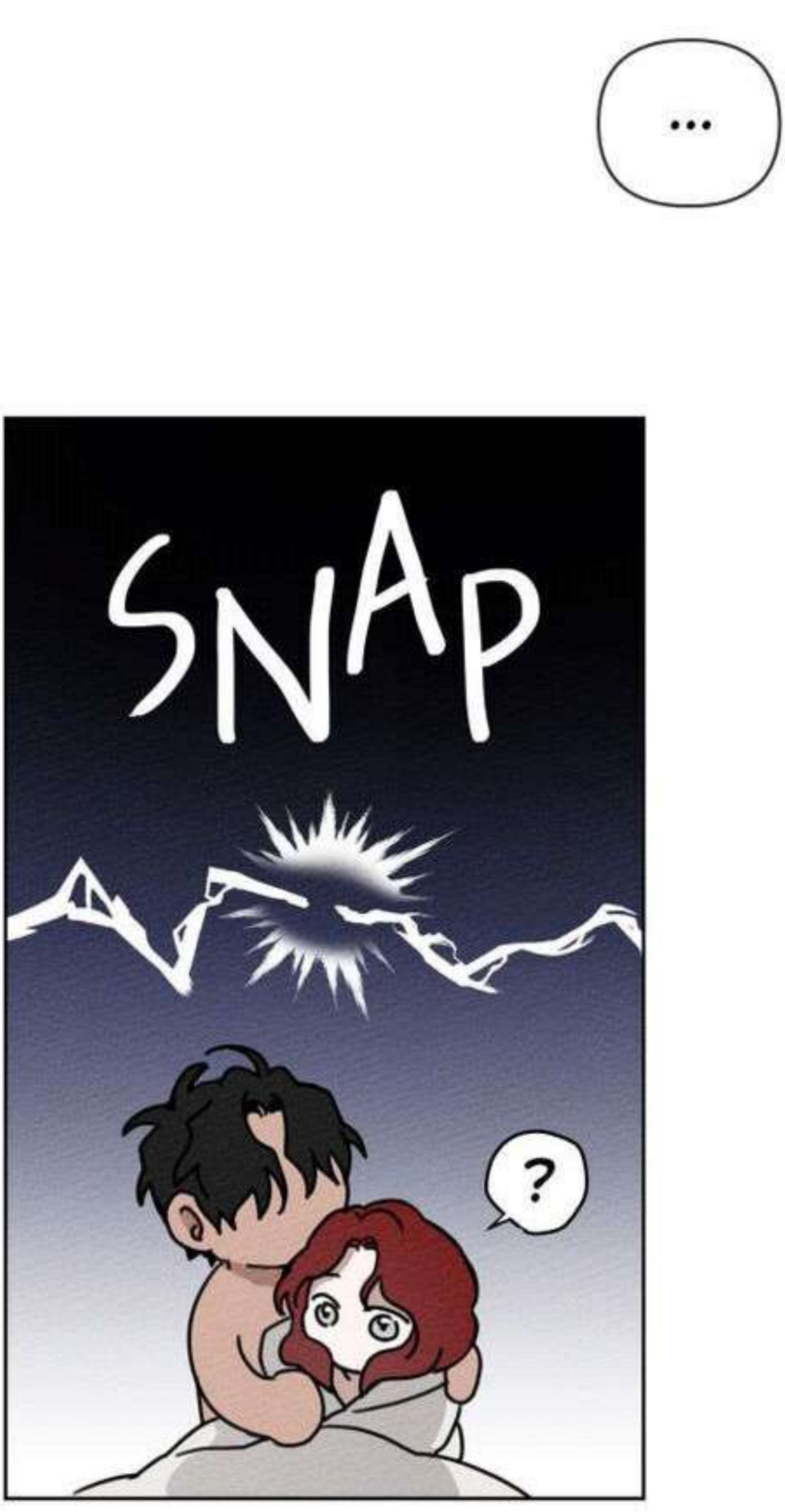

...!

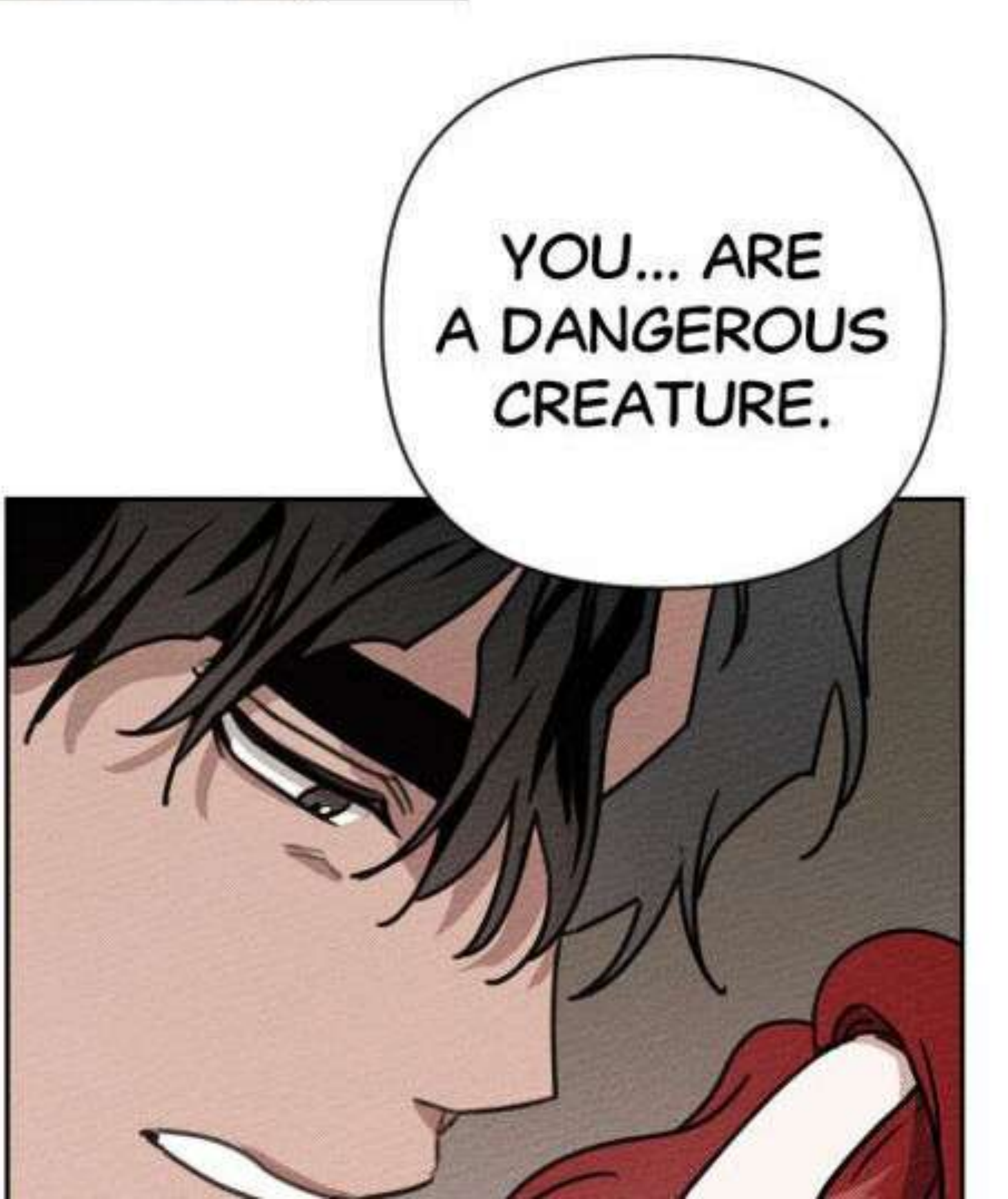

A-ARE THESE
S-SCRATCH MARKS?!

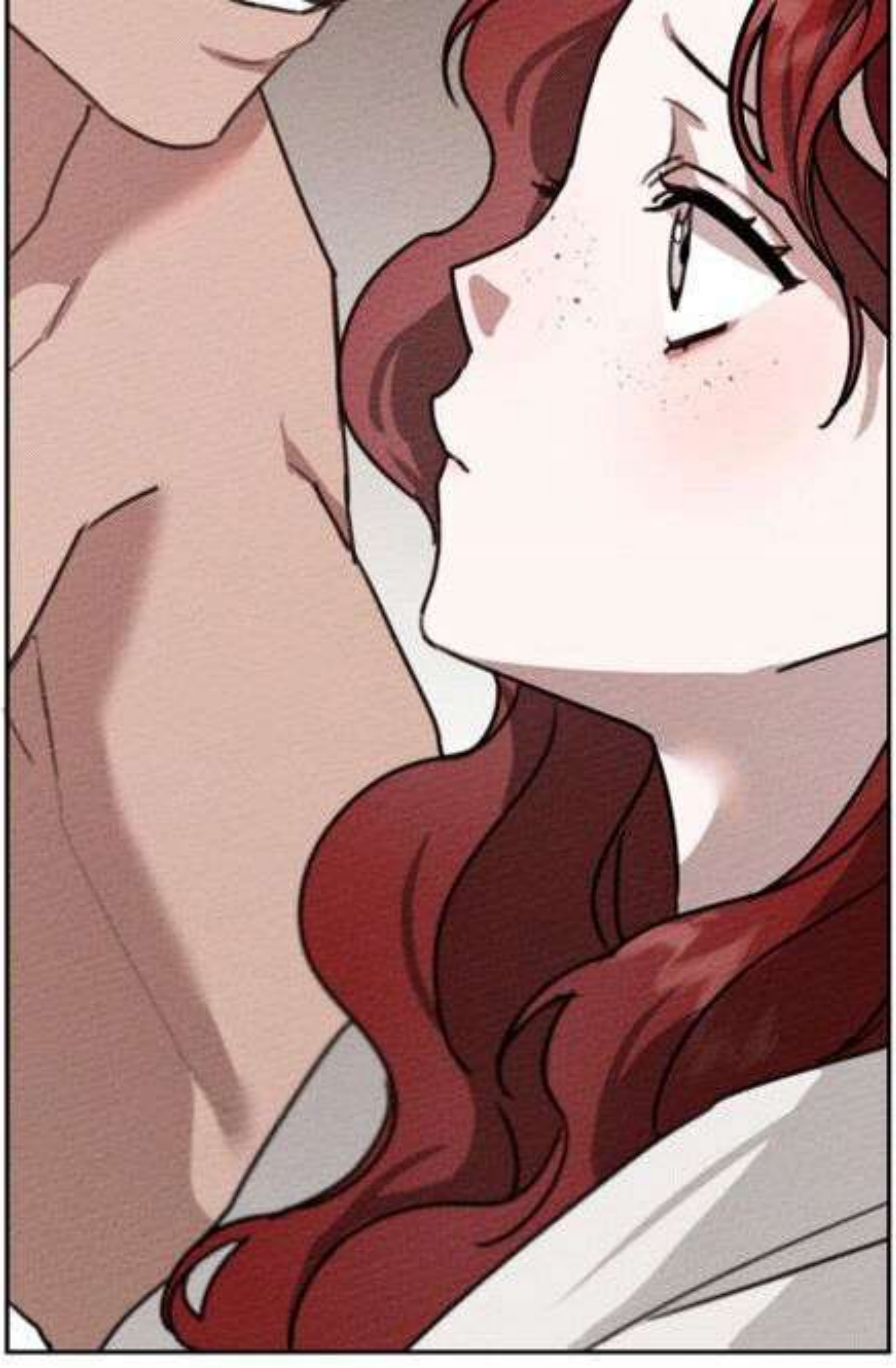

I'M S-SORRY.
I D-DIDN'T MEAN TO... D-DOES IT HURT?
CLENCH


TURN


YOU KNOW, NOT EVEN A BASILISK HAS EVER WOUNDED ME.
MUMBLE
...!
I-I'M SORRY.
I'LL A-ASK THE M-MAID TO BRING YOU SOME M-MEDICINE.

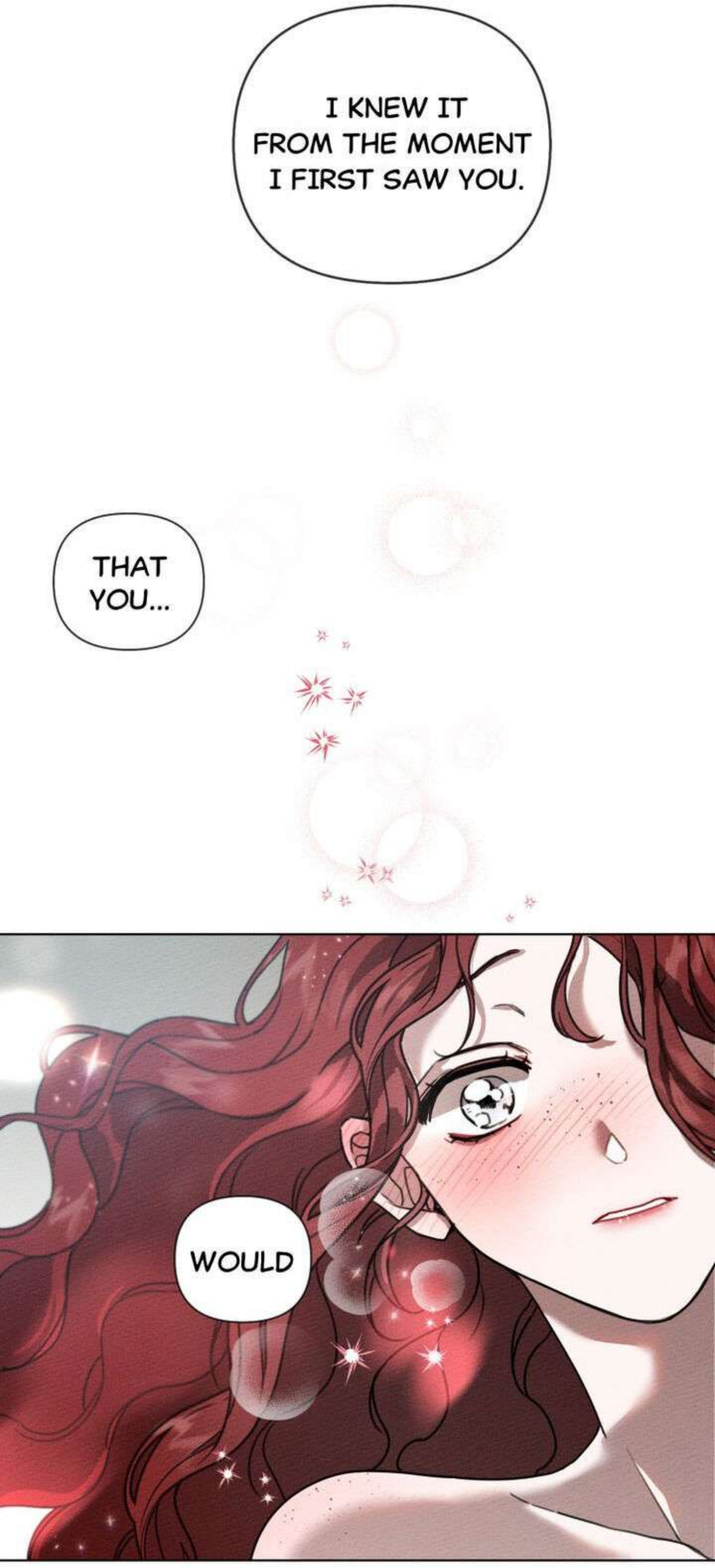

...
SNAP
?


YOU... ARE A DANGEROUS CREATURE.



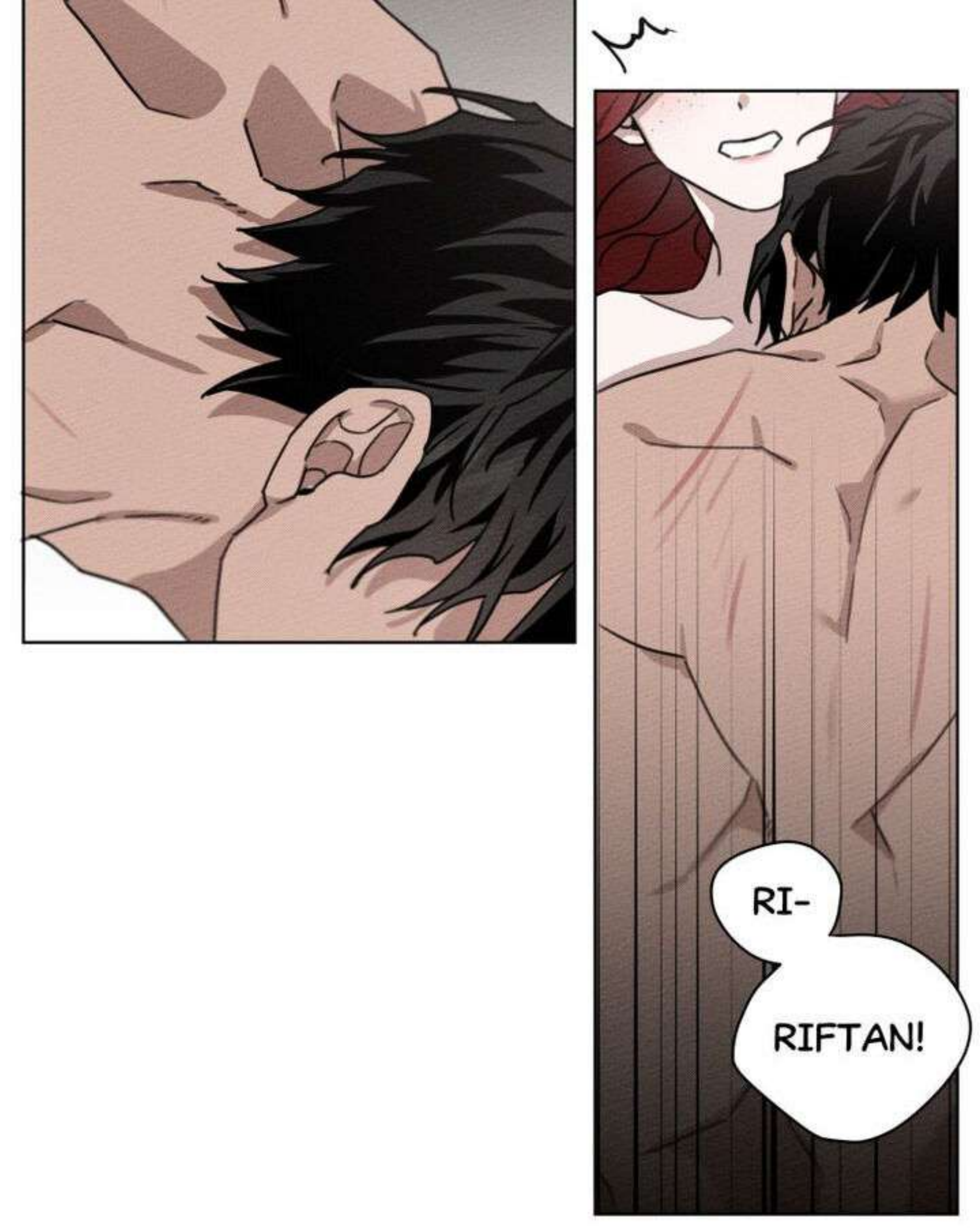
MMPH
NNGH

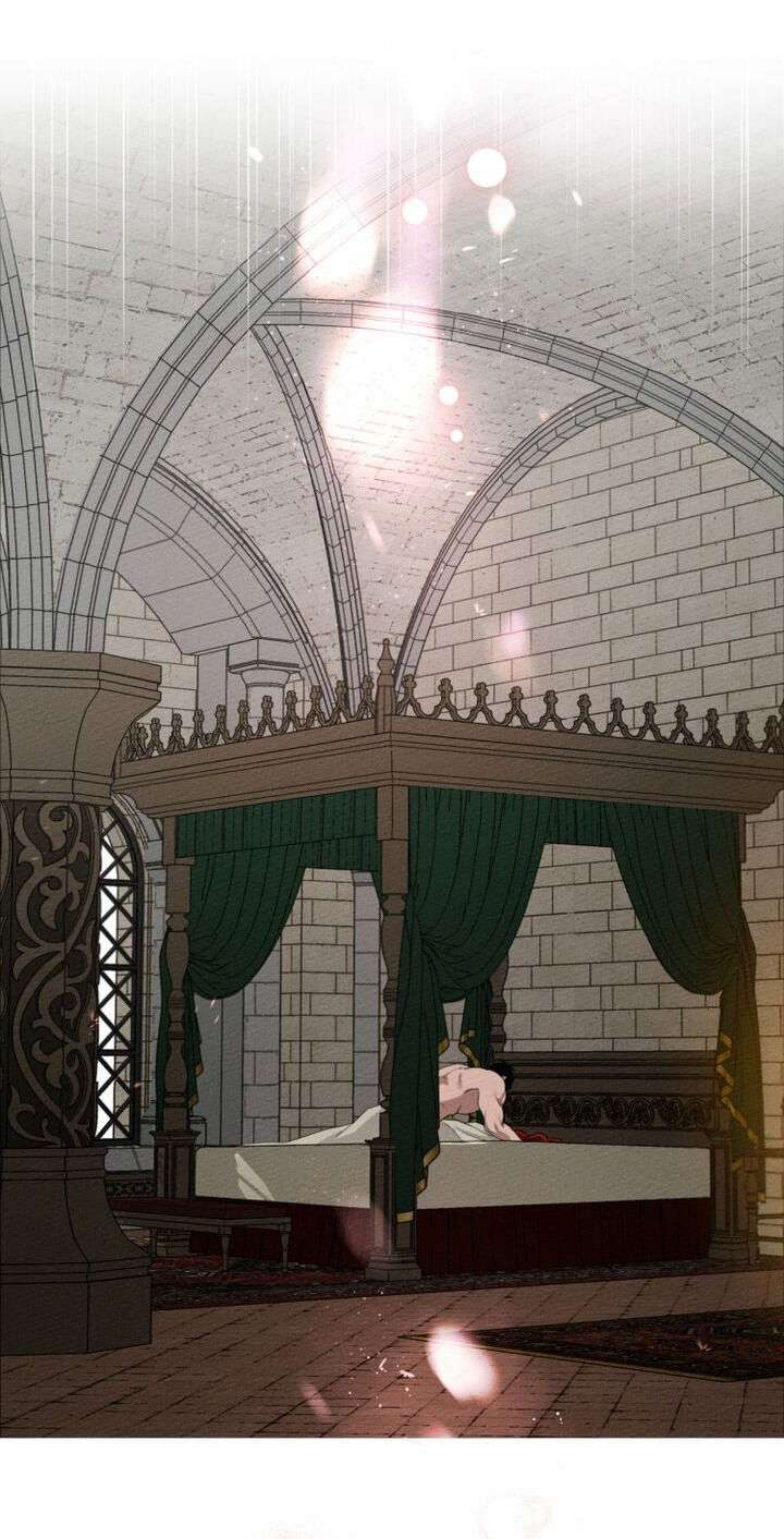
AH!
FLIP


I KNEW IT FROM THE MOMENT I FIRST SAW YOU.
THAT YOU...
WOULD

...COVER ME WITH SCARS.

CREAK..

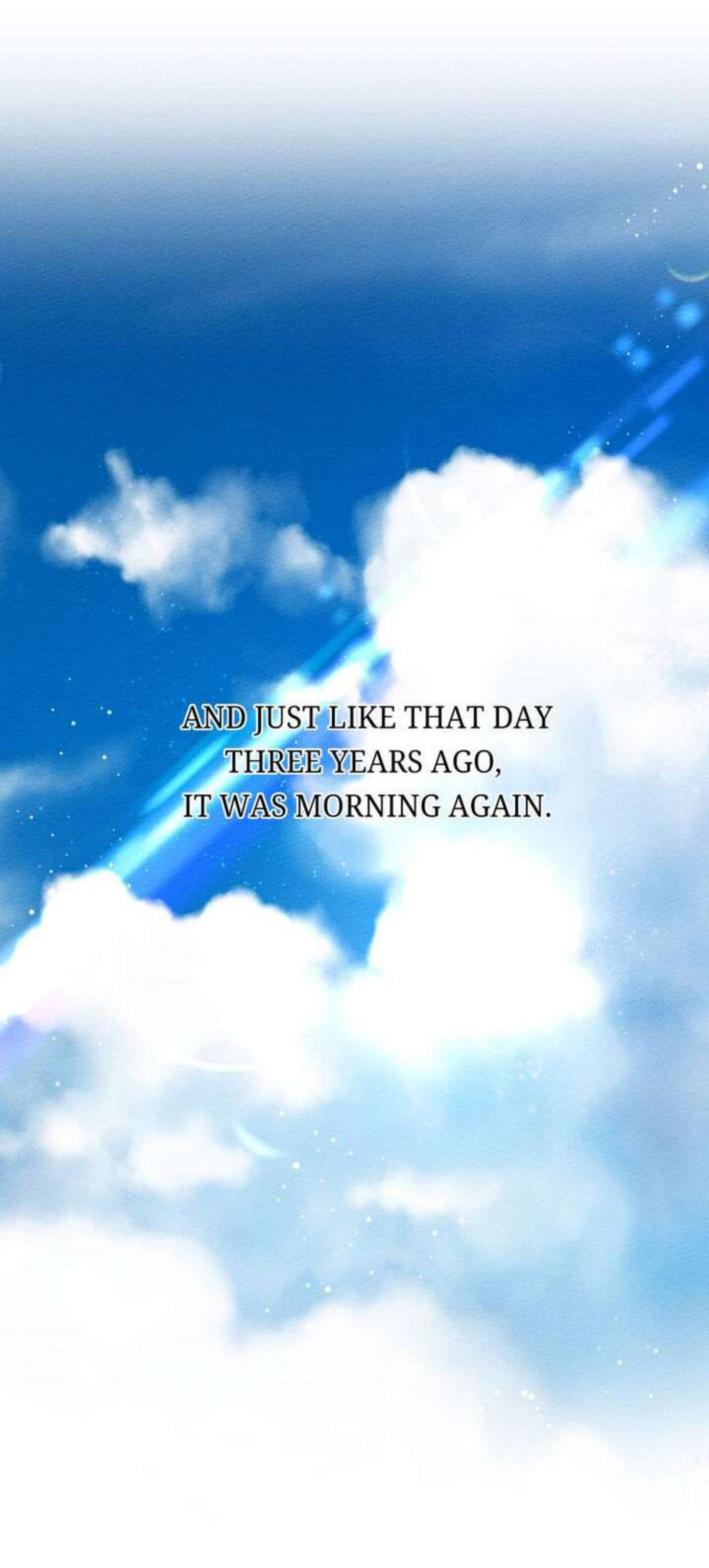

RI-
RIFTAN!



TIME PASSED IN
A HAZE, LIKE THE
NEVER-ENDING RAIN.

DAY
TURNED
TO NIGHT,

AND
THE NIGHT
GAVE WAY
TO DAWN.

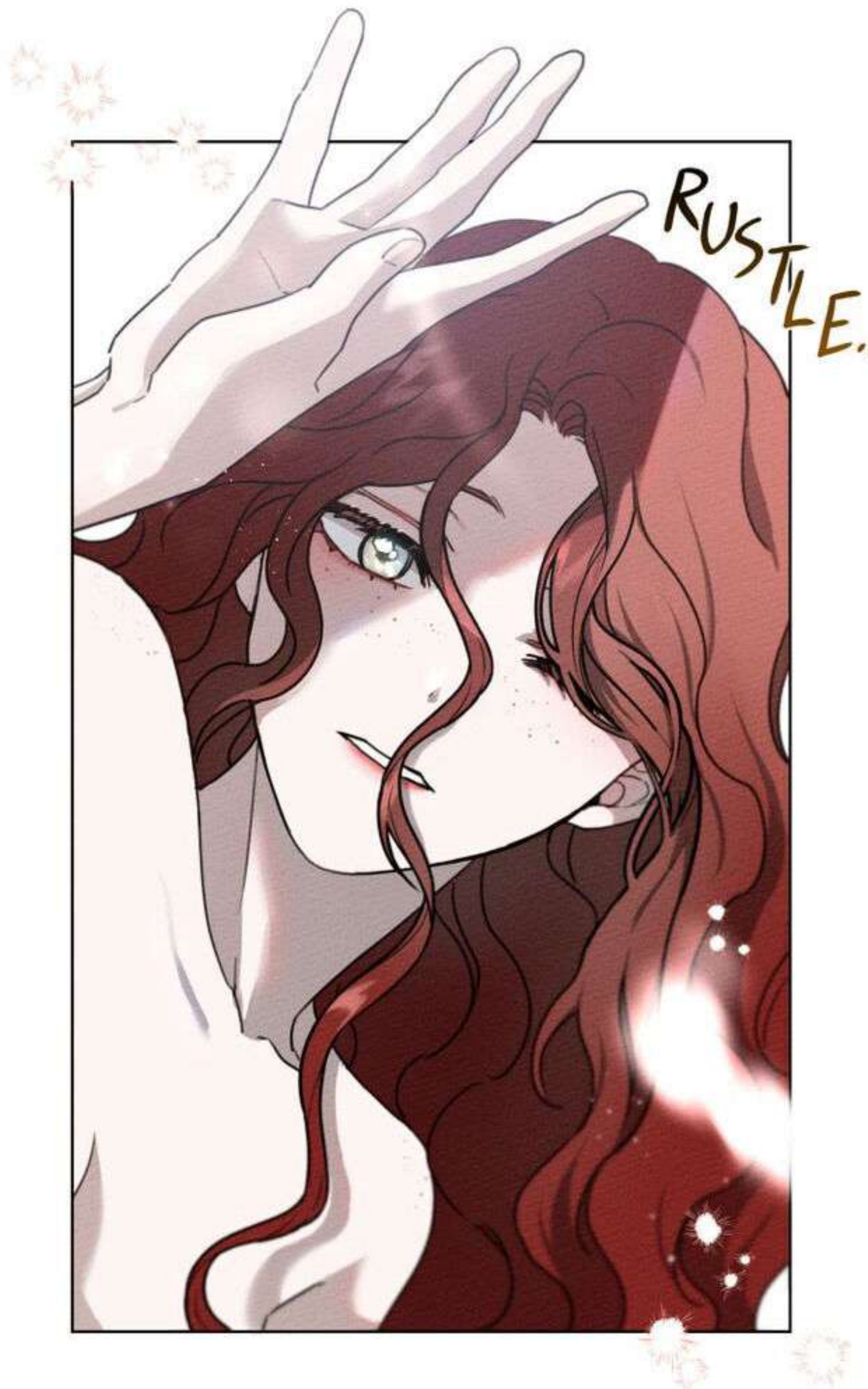

AND JUST LIKE THAT DAY
THREE YEARS AGO,
IT WAS MORNING AGAIN.

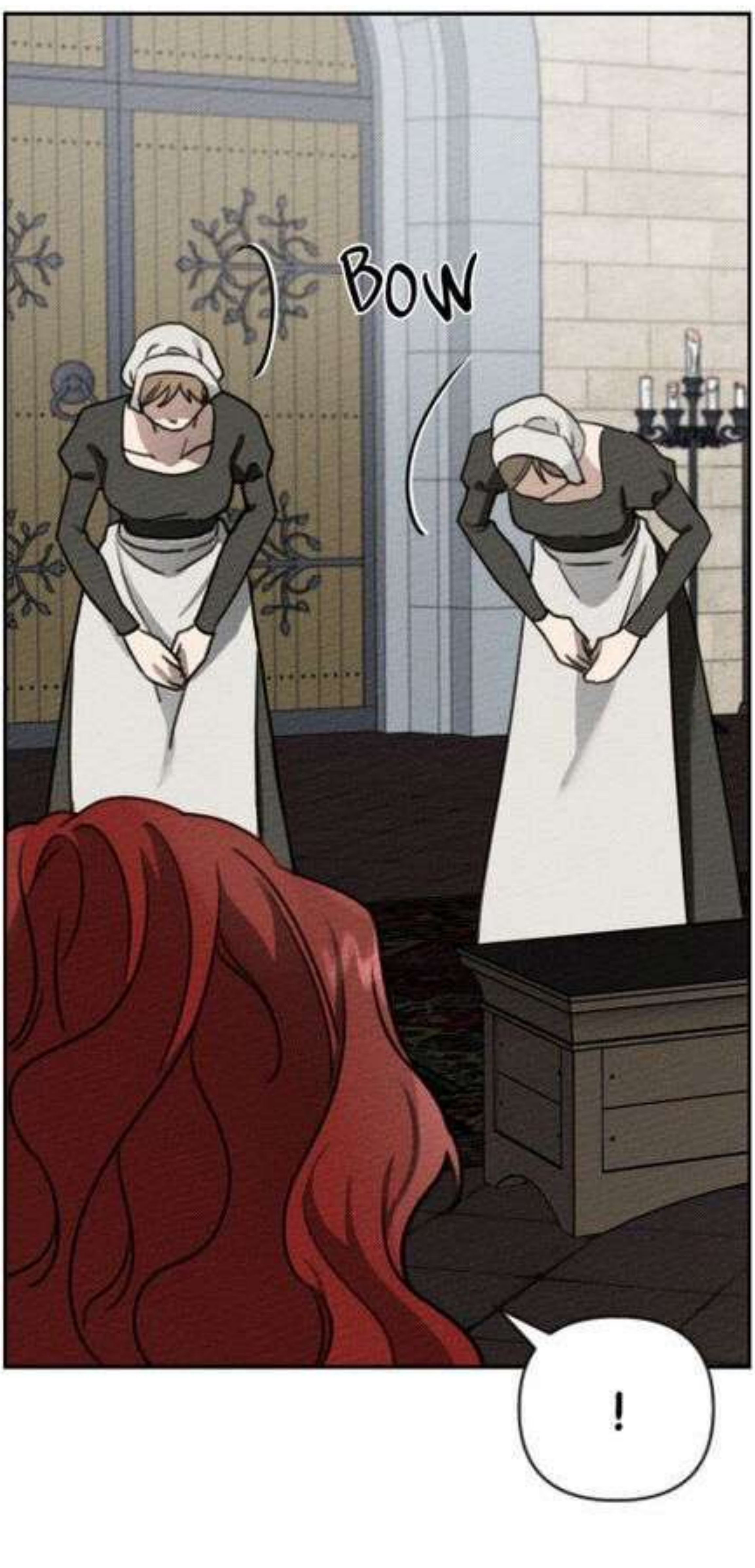
Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

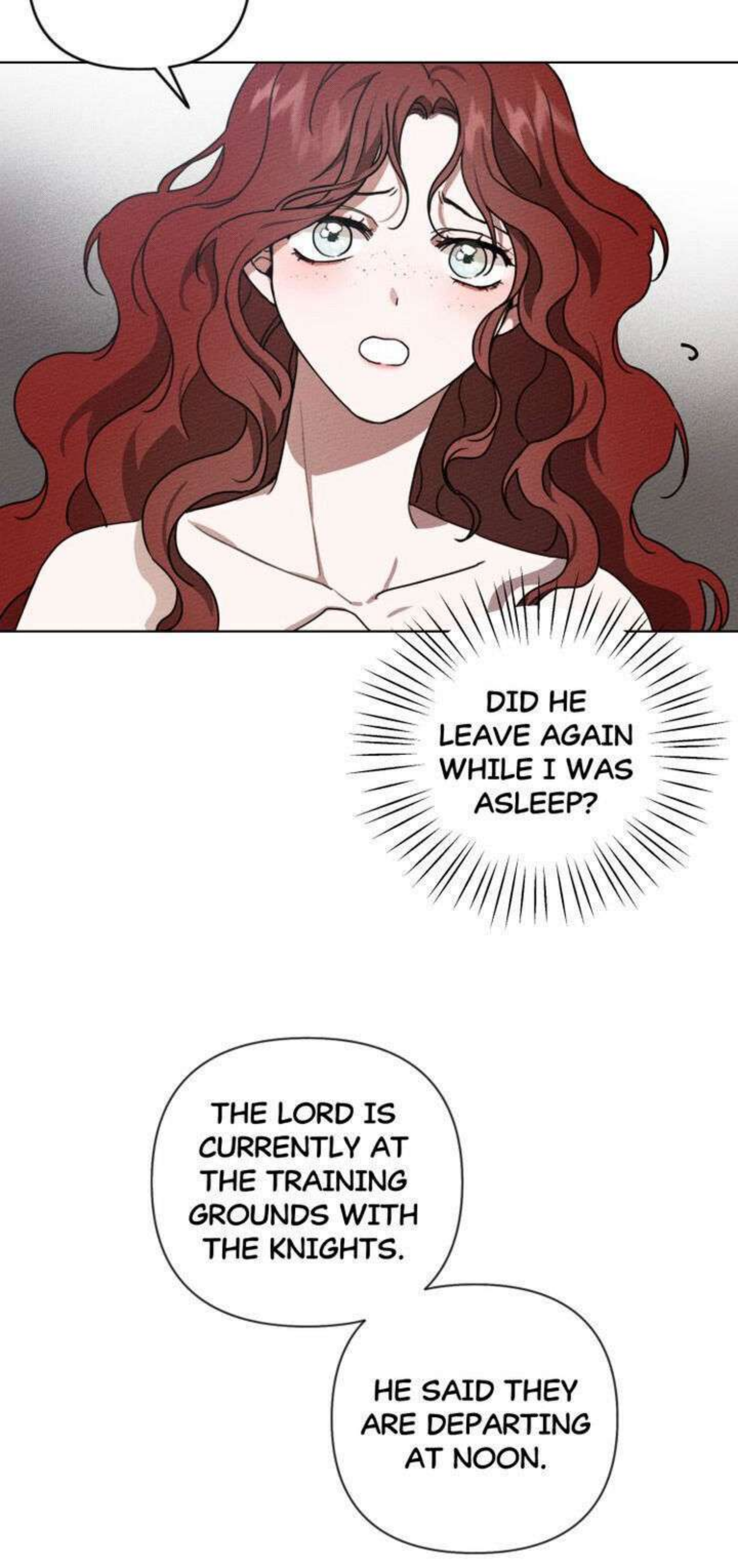
16

FLUTTER

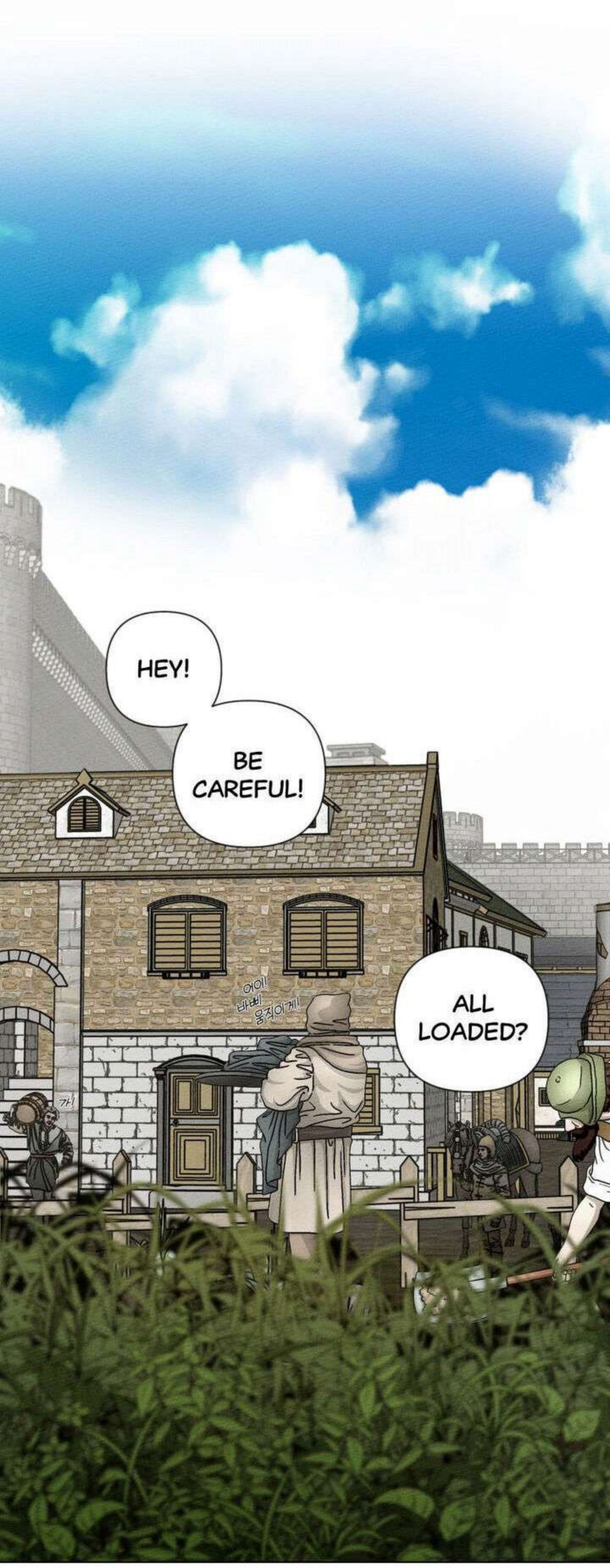


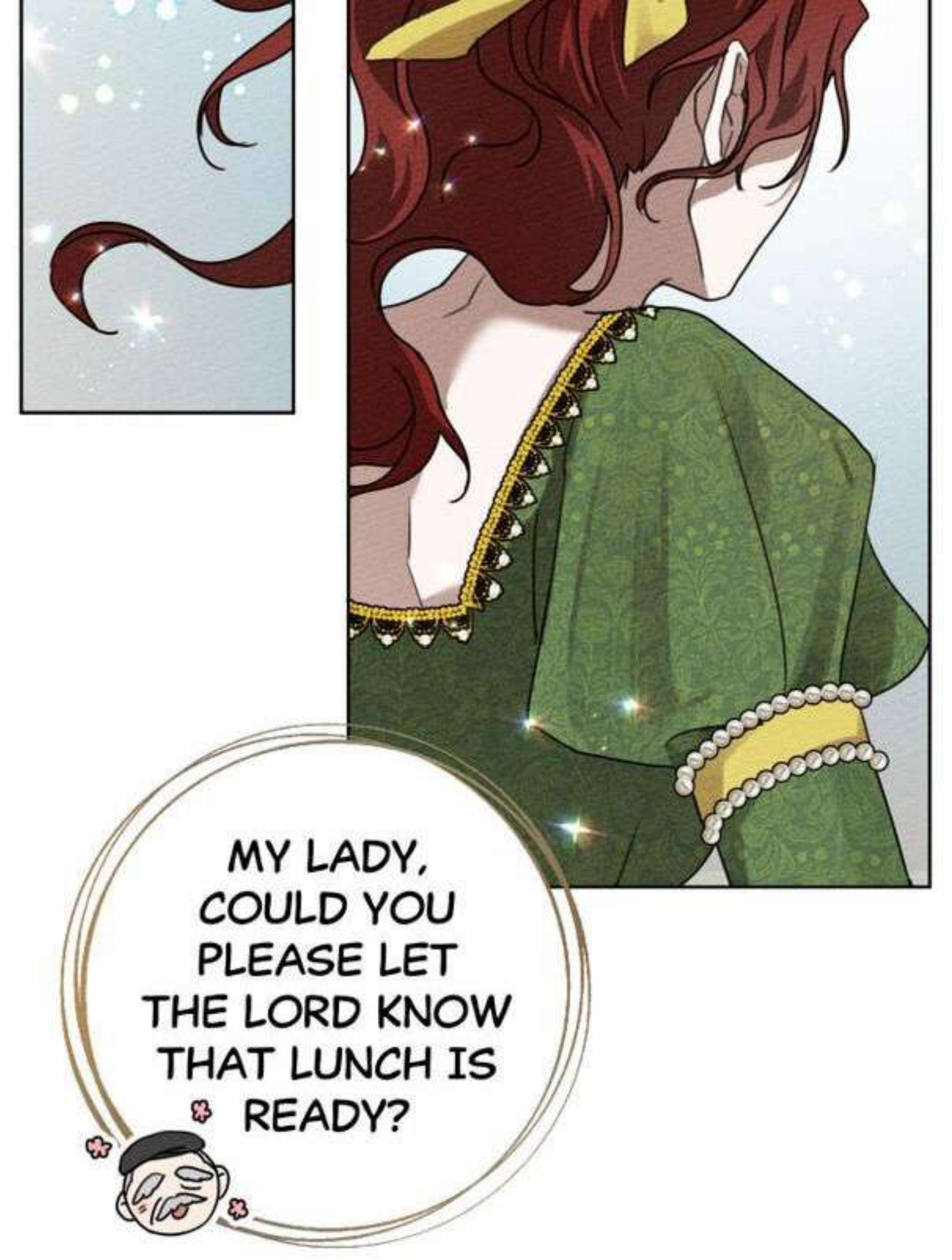


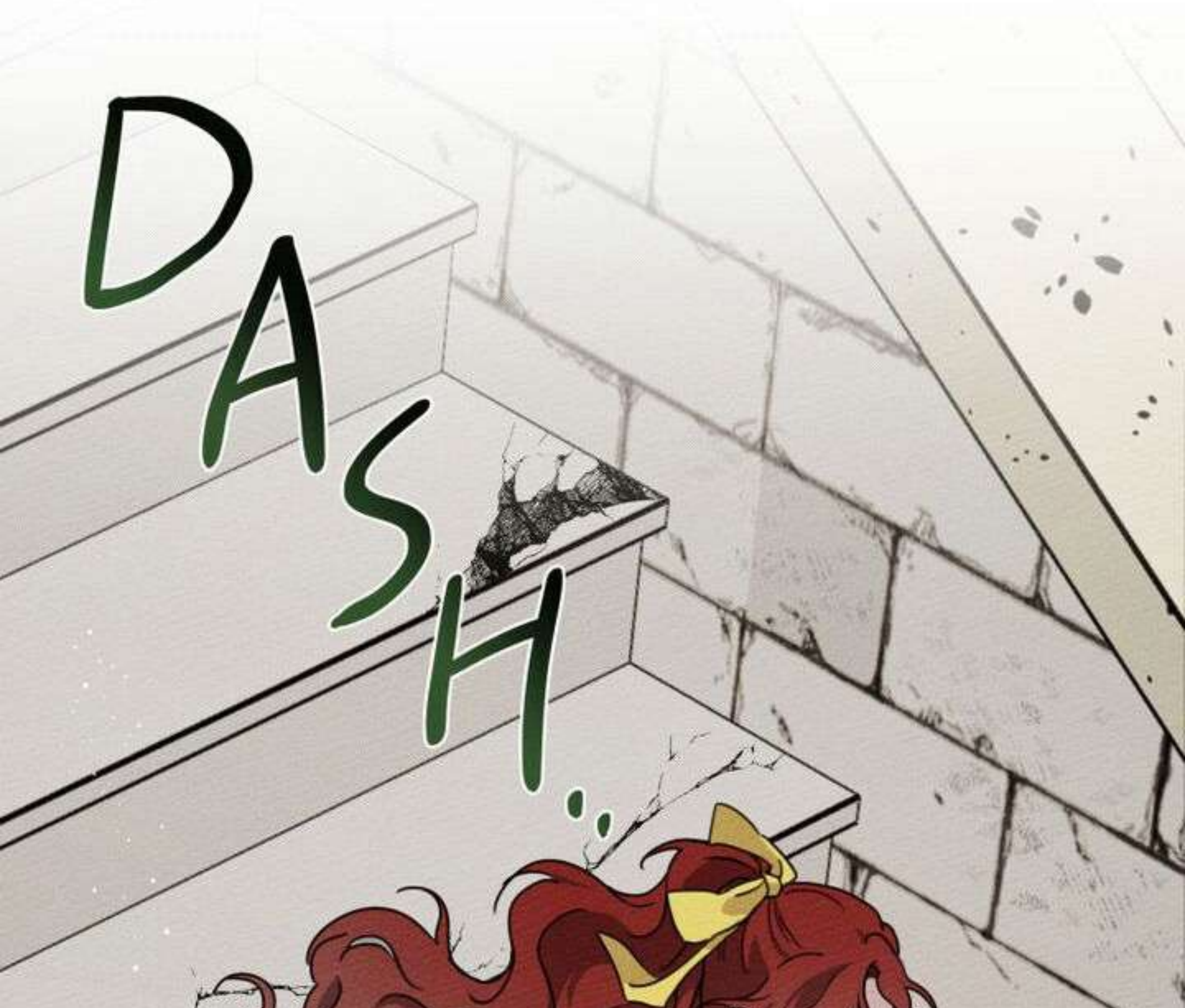
W-WHERE IS R-RIFTAN?


DID HE LEAVE AGAIN WHILE I WAS ASLEEP?
THE LORD IS CURRENTLY AT THE TRAINING GROUNDS WITH THE KNIGHTS.
HE SAID THEY ARE DEPARTING AT NOON.

PHEW... THANK GOODNESS.
STEP..
I CAN SEND HIM OFF PROPERLY THIS TIME.

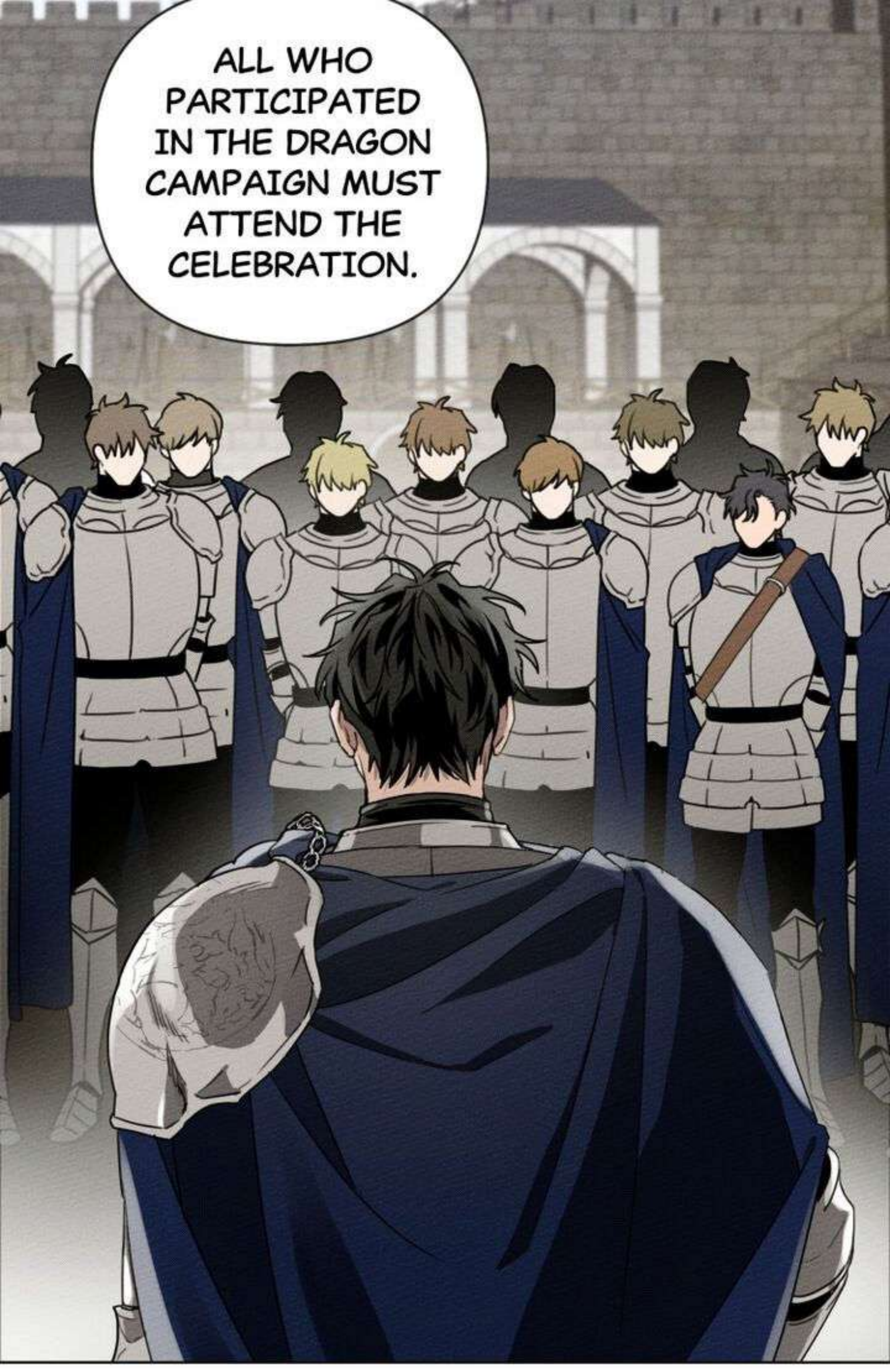

HEY!
BE CAREFUL!
어이! 바삐 움직이게!
가!
ALL LOADED?

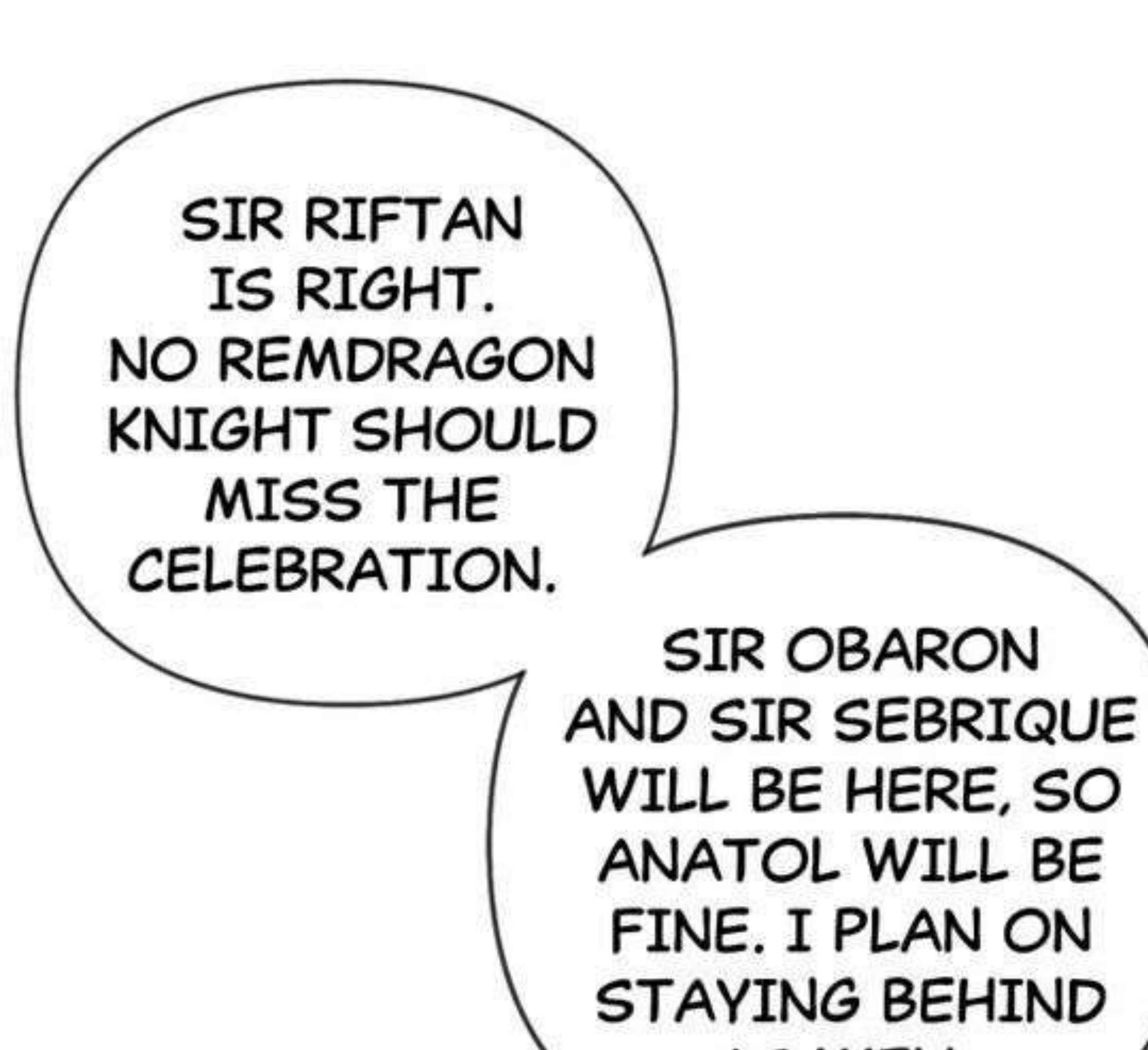

MY LADY, COULD YOU PLEASE LET THE LORD KNOW THAT LUNCH IS READY?

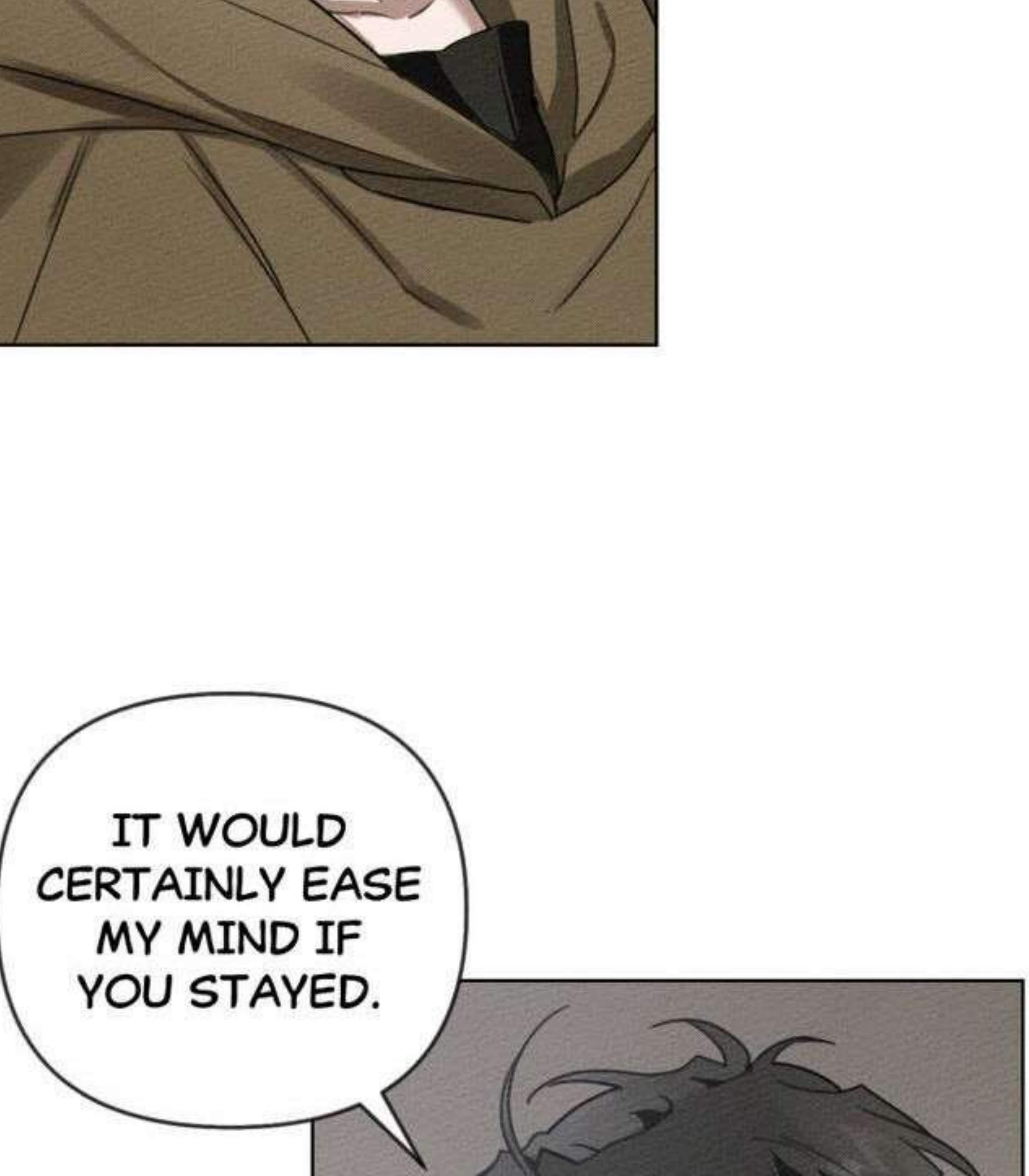

DASH...

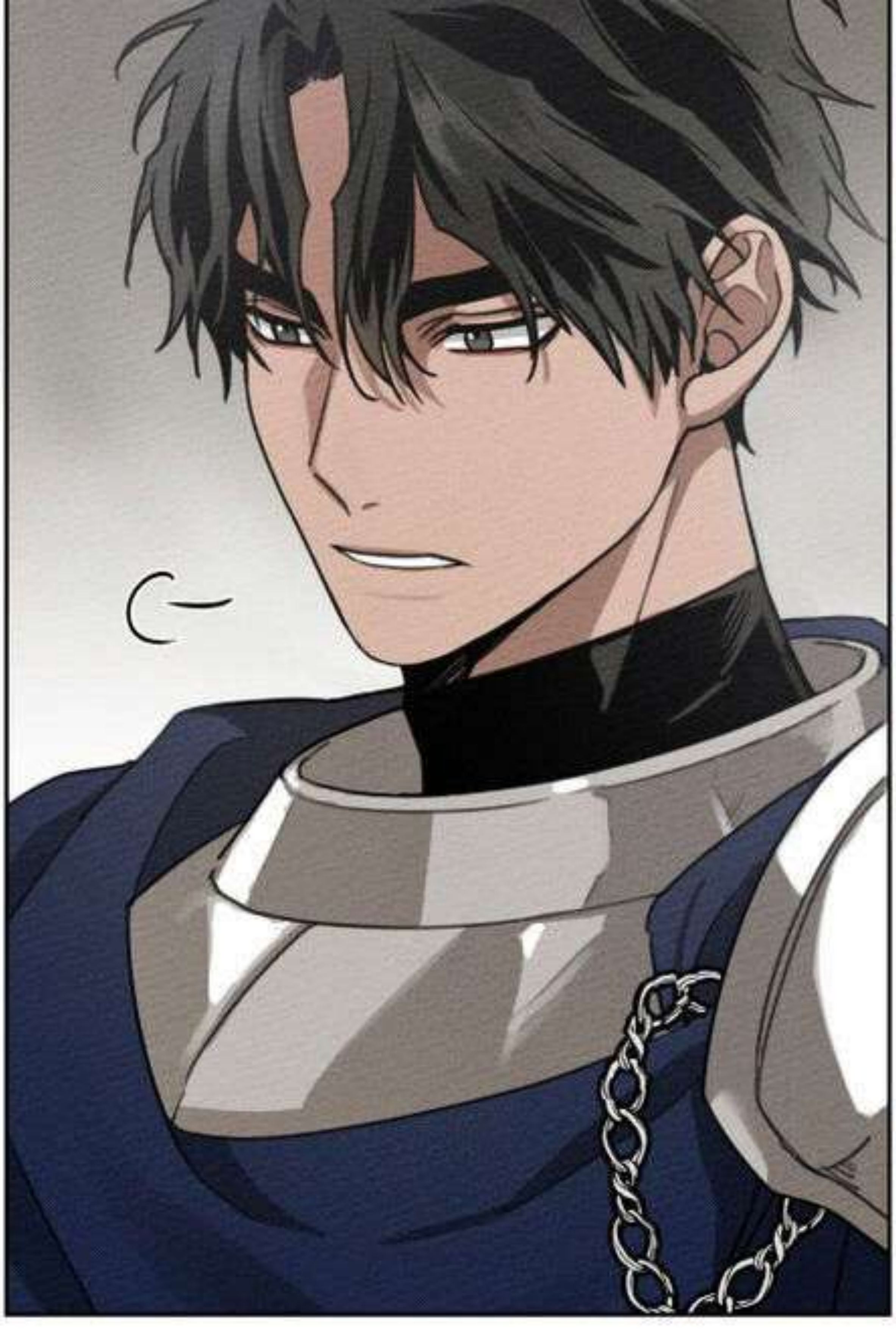
I CAN SPEND A FEW MORE MINUTES WITH HIM BEFORE HE LEAVES!

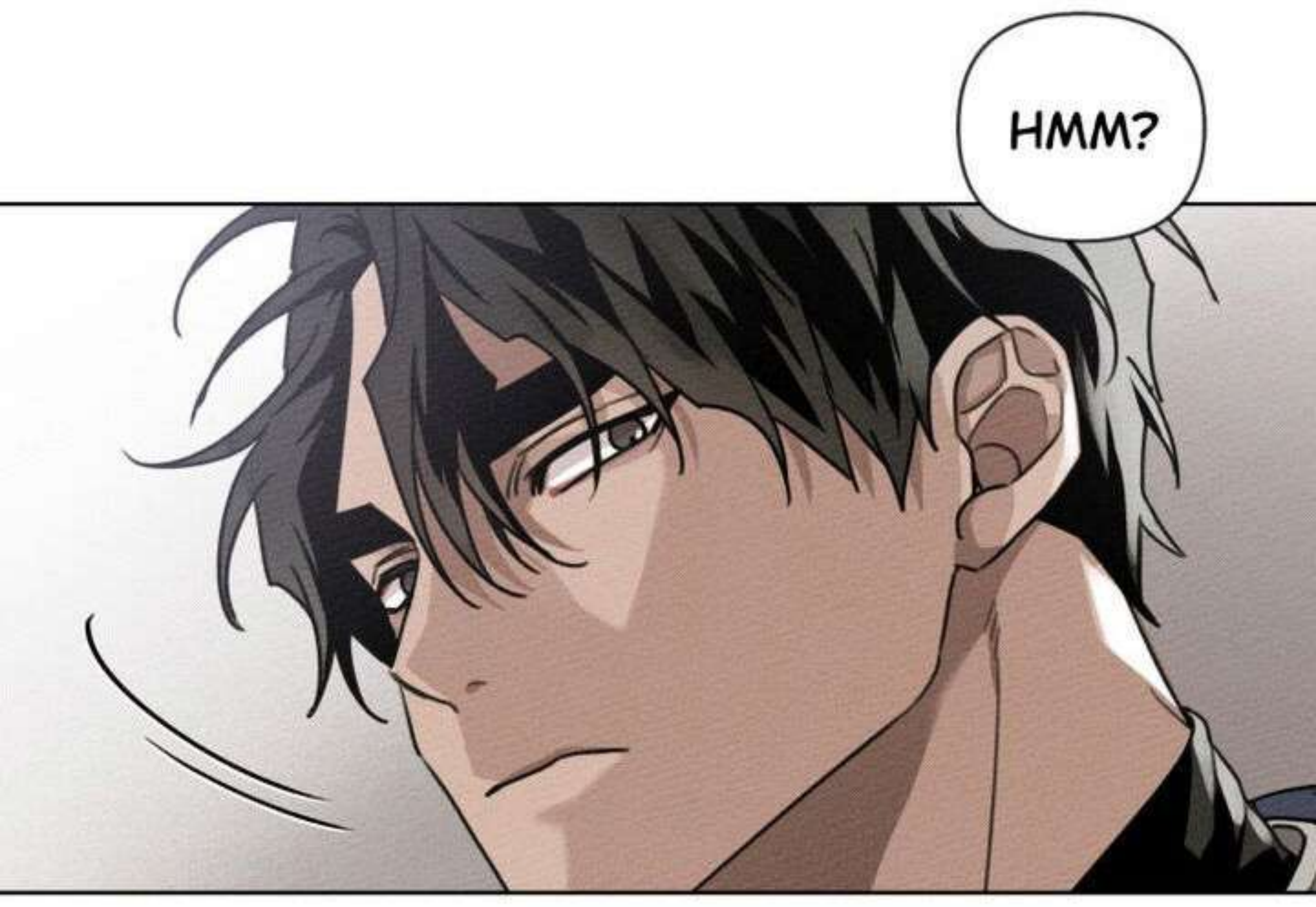
I CAN'T AGREE TO THAT.
EVERYONE WILL RECEIVE THEIR DUE CREDIT.

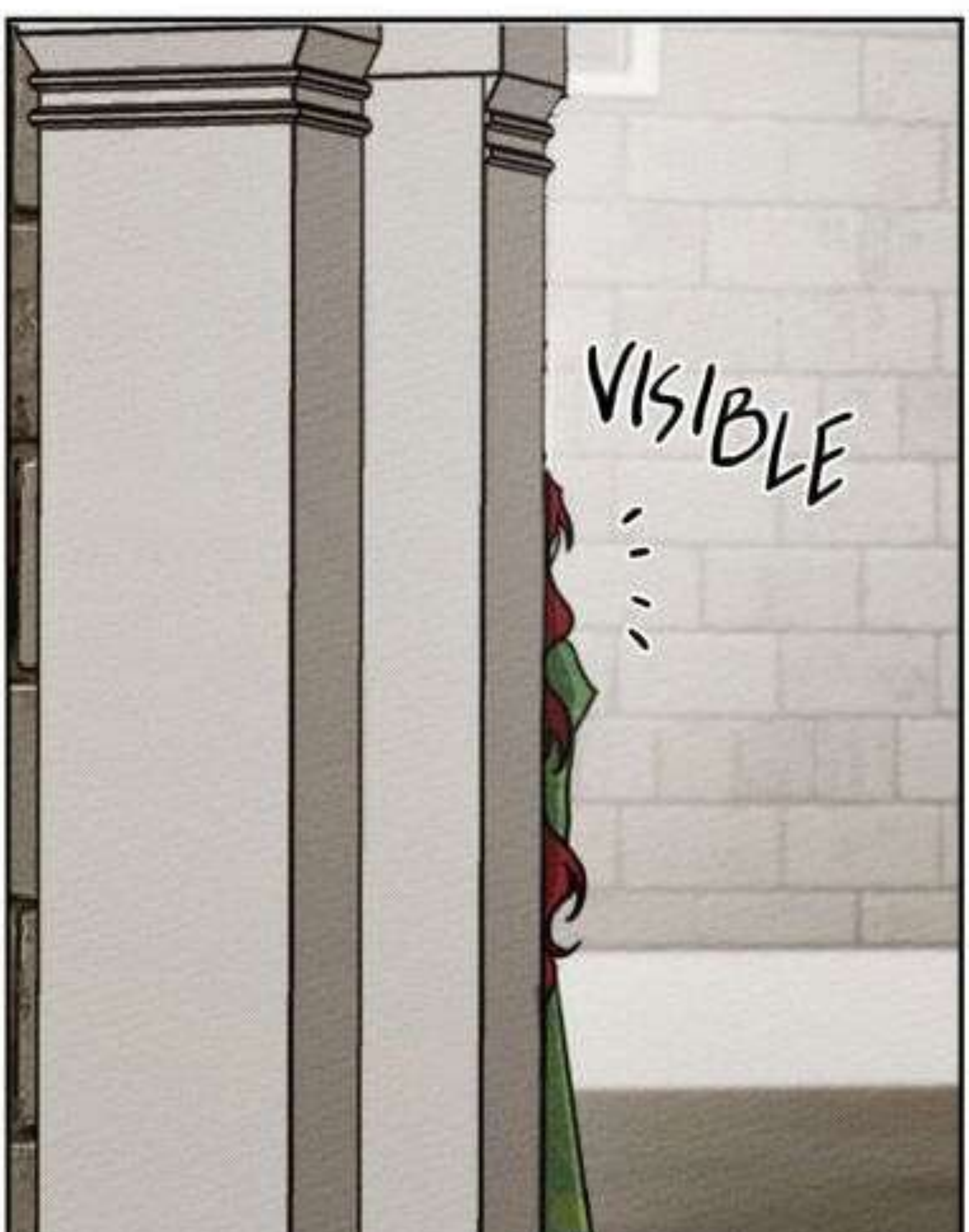

ALL WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE DRAGON CAMPAIGN MUST ATTEND THE CELEBRATION.

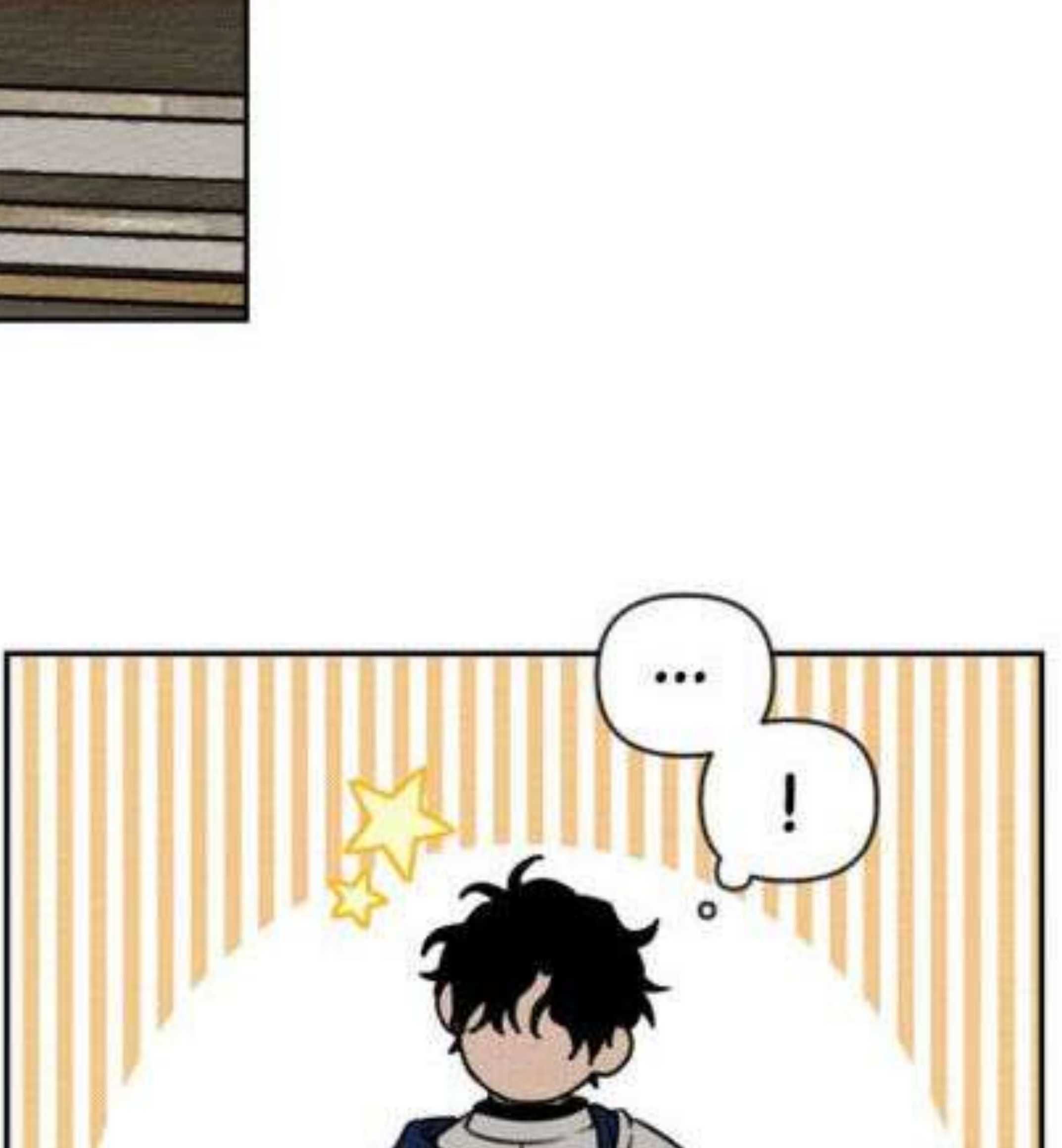

SIR RIFTAN IS RIGHT. NO REMDRAGON KNIGHT SHOULD MISS THE CELEBRATION.
SIR OBARON AND SIR SEBRIQUE WILL BE HERE, SO ANATOL WILL BE FINE. I PLAN ON STAYING BEHIND AS WELL.
SIGH..

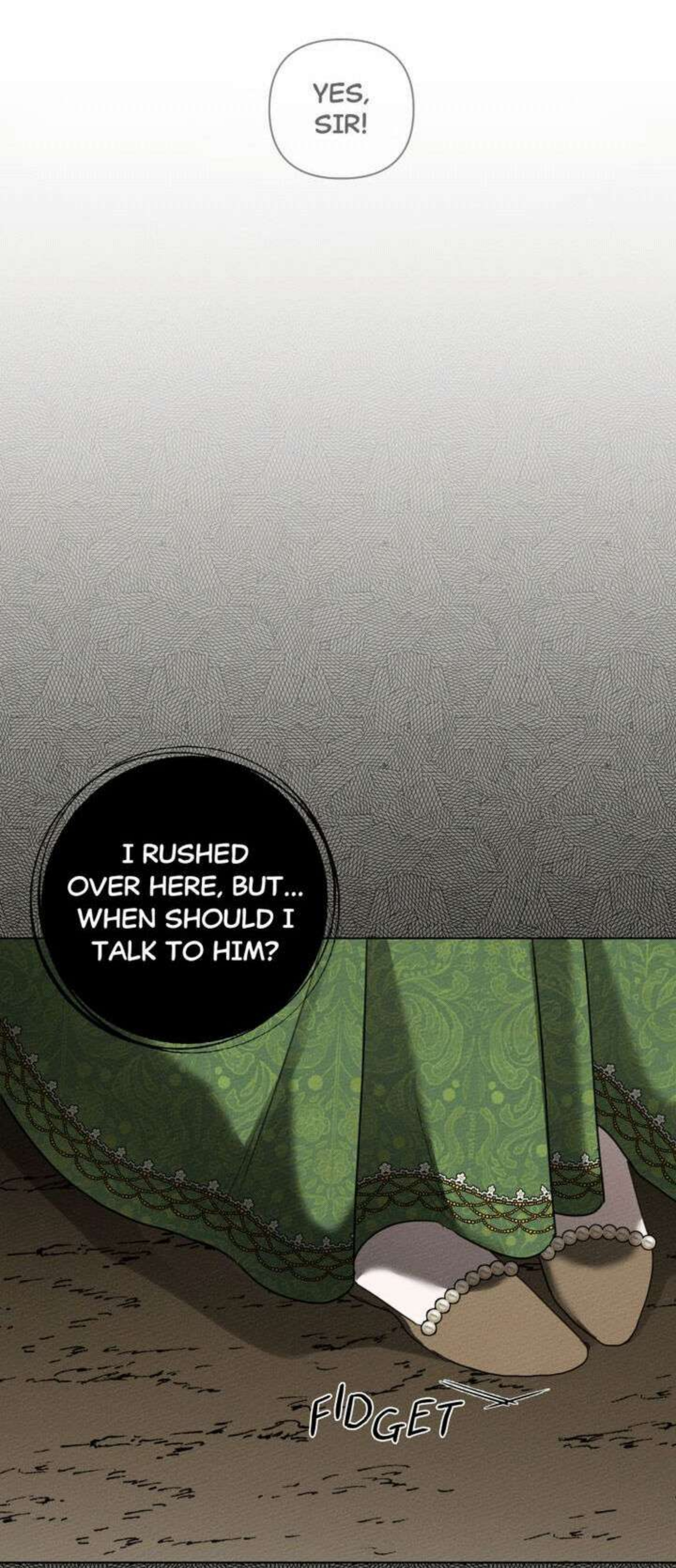

IT WOULD CERTAINLY EASE MY MIND IF YOU STAYED.

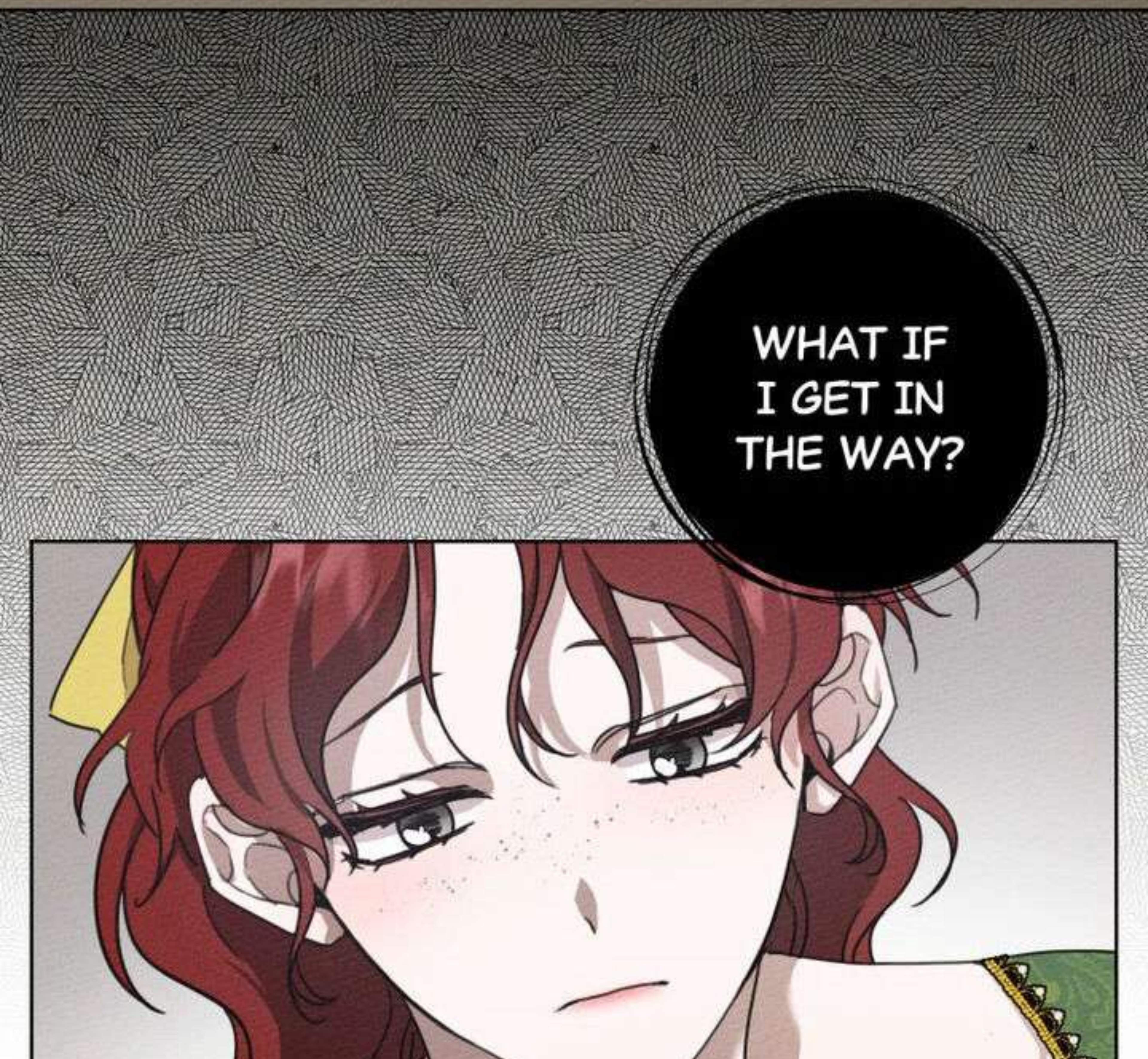

C—

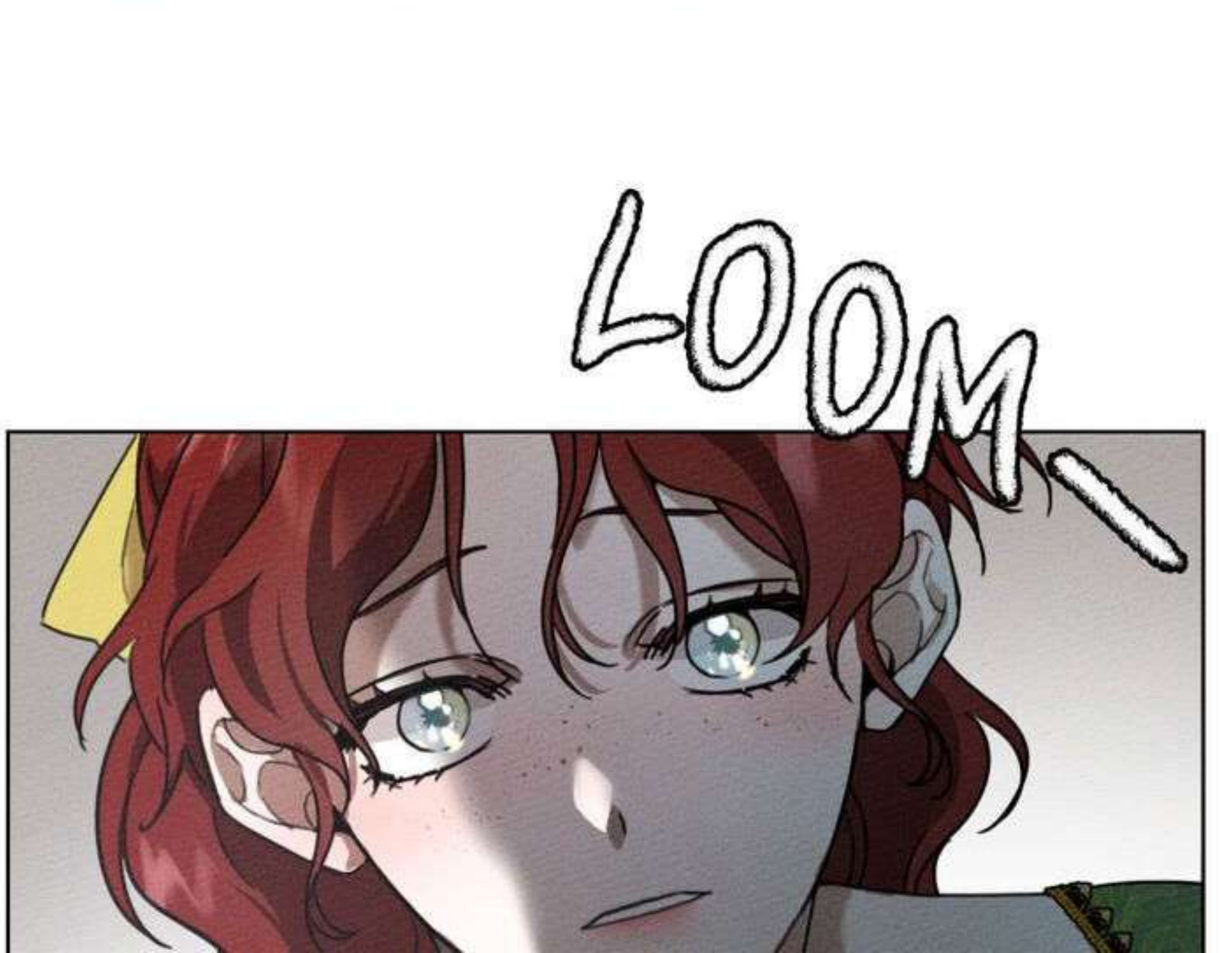

HMM?

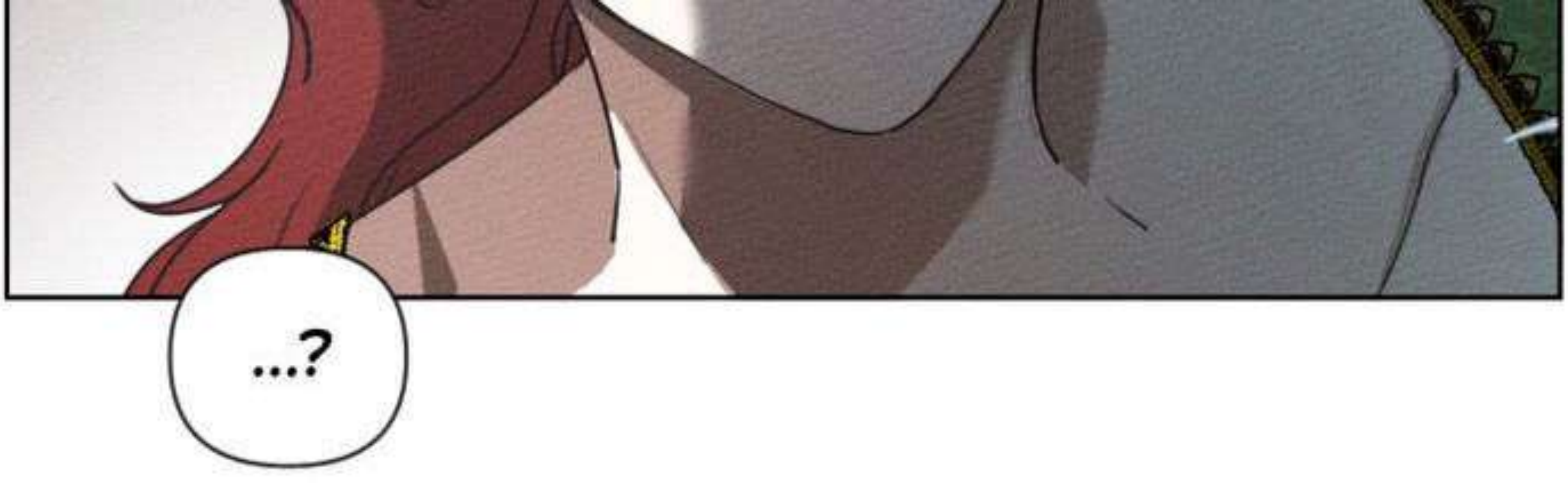

VISIBLE
...

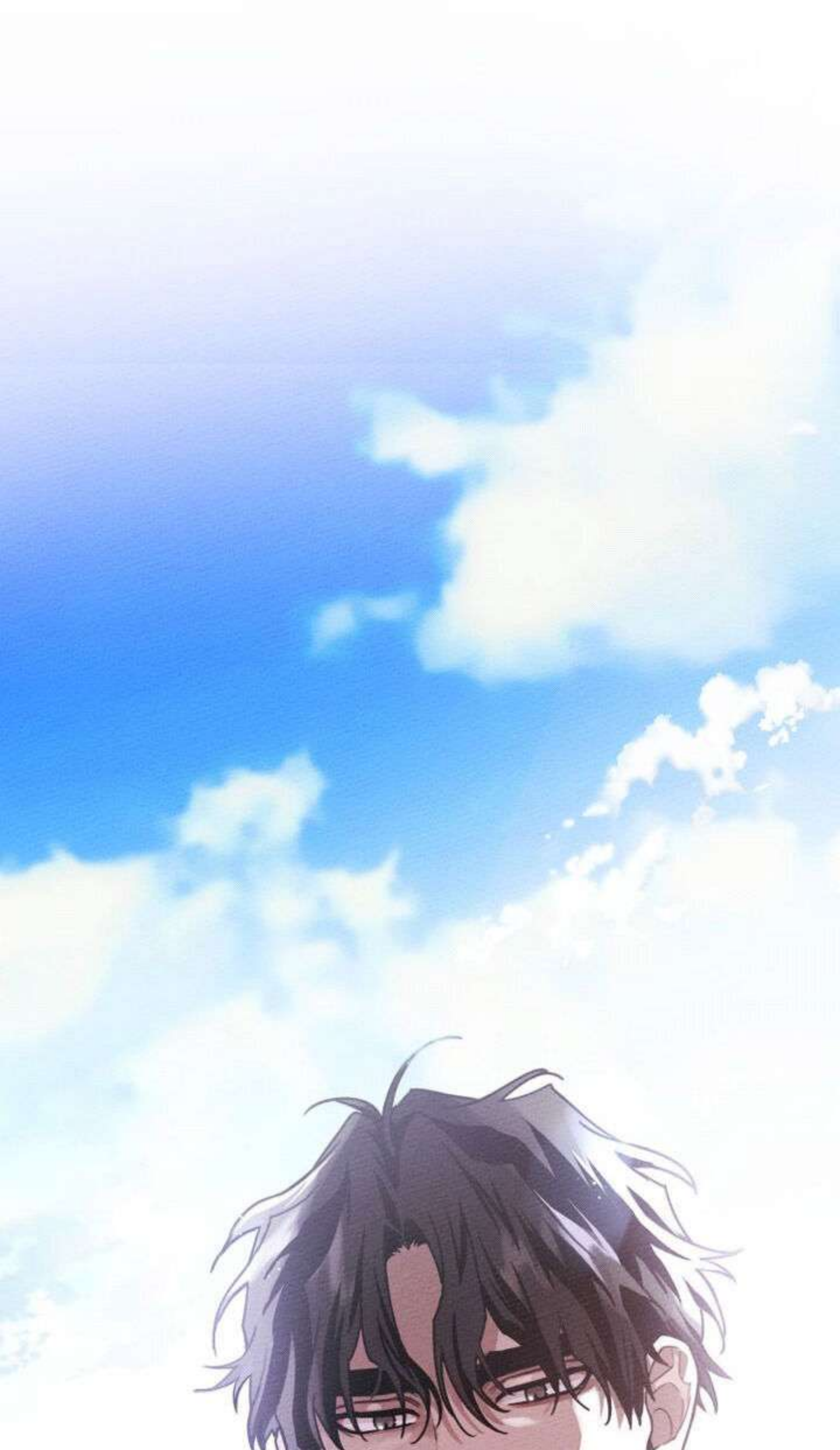

...
!


YES, SIR!
I RUSHED OVER HERE, BUT... WHEN SHOULD I TALK TO HIM?
FIDGET

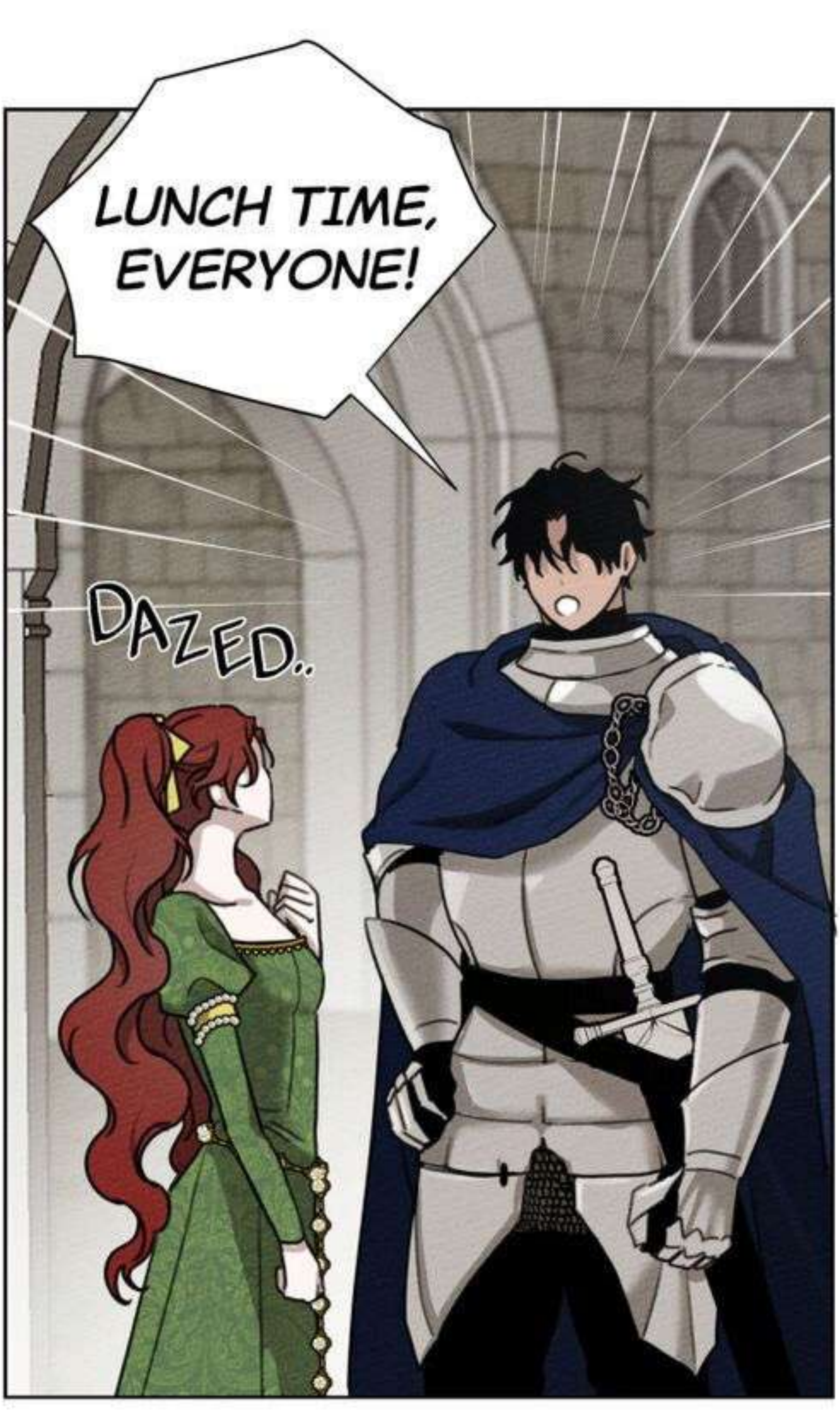

WHAT IF I GET IN THE WAY?


LOOM-


...?

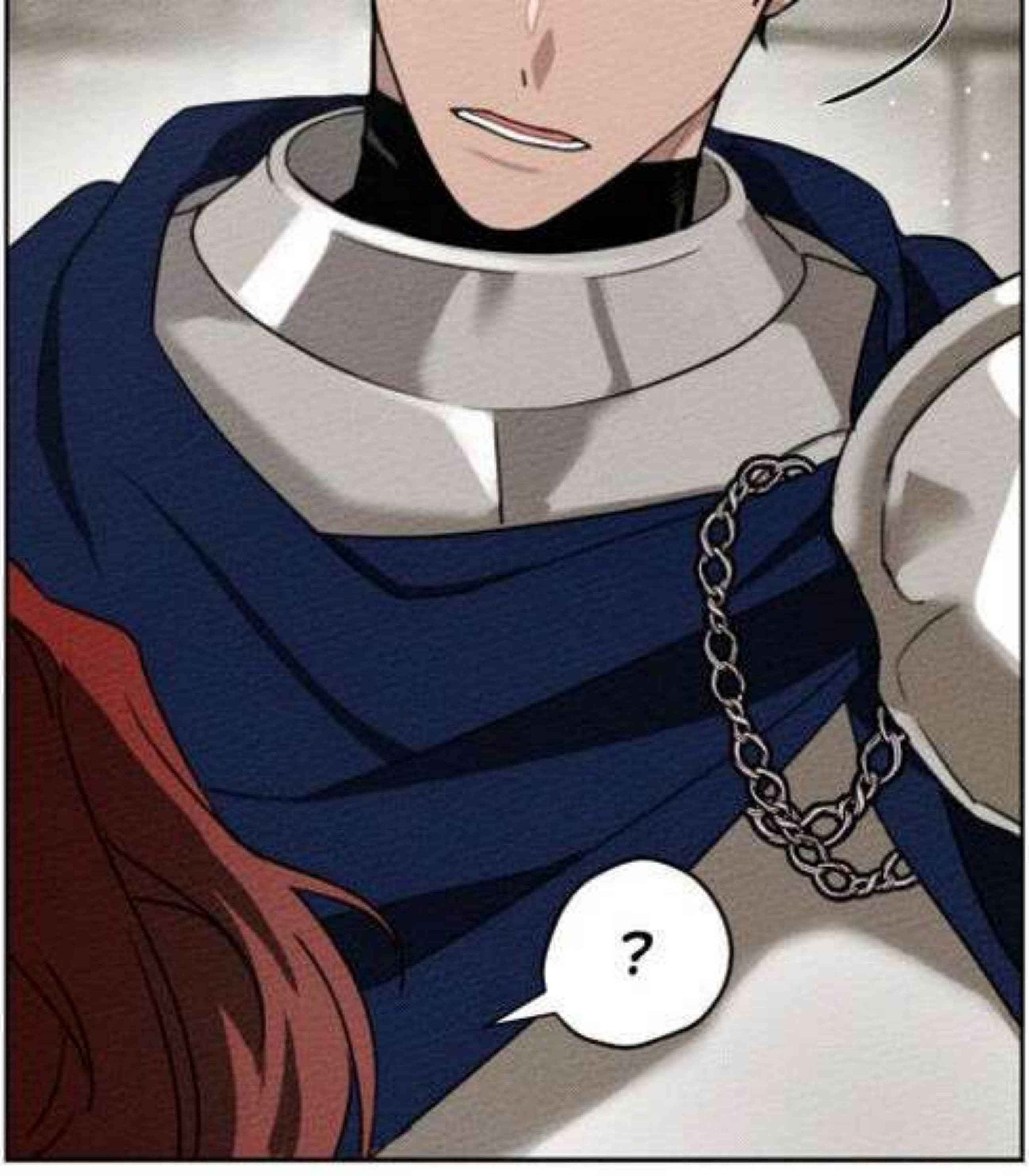


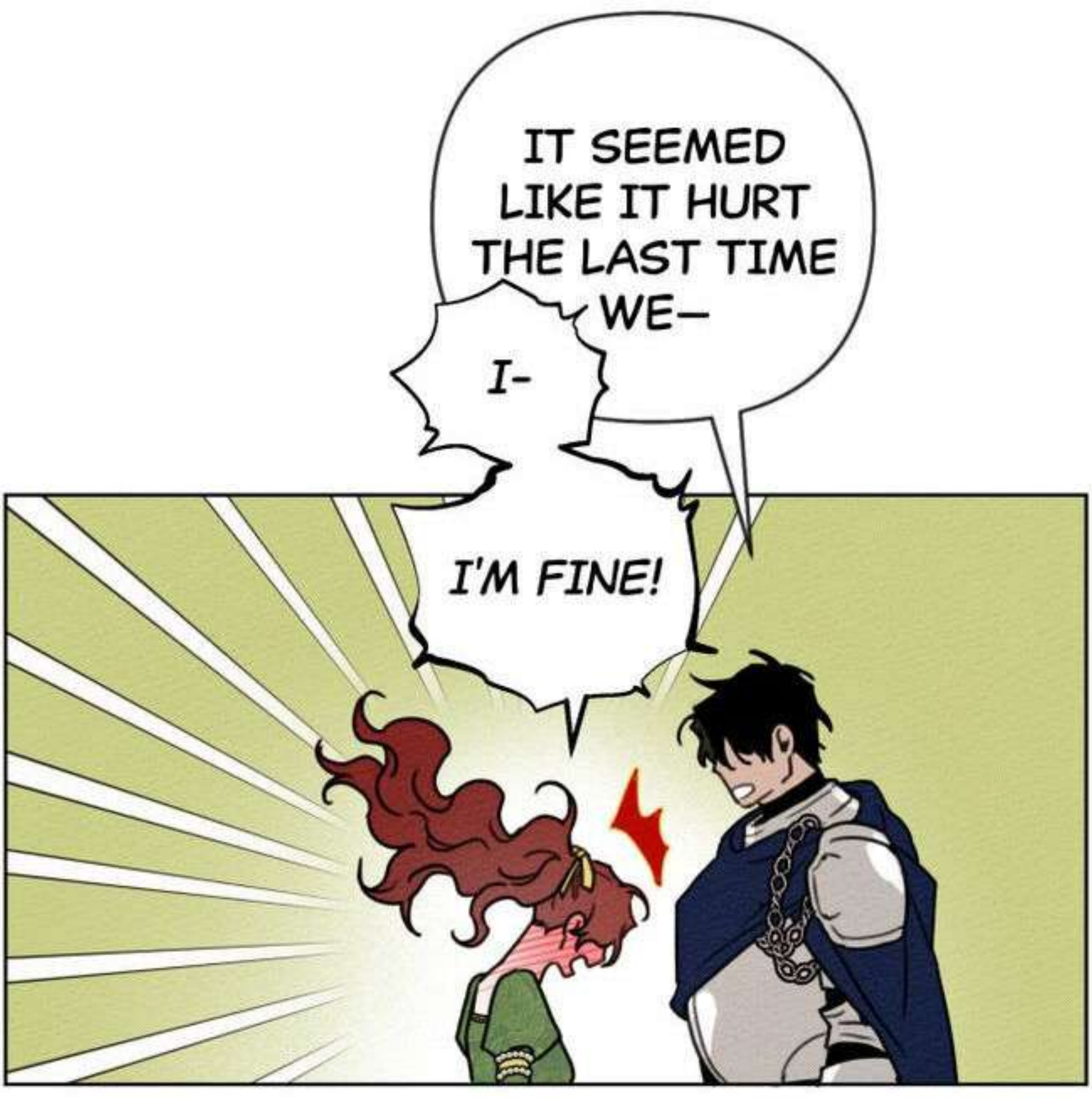
OH... R-RODRIGO SAID THAT L-LUNCH IS READY....
SO... I C-CAME TO T-TELL YOU...

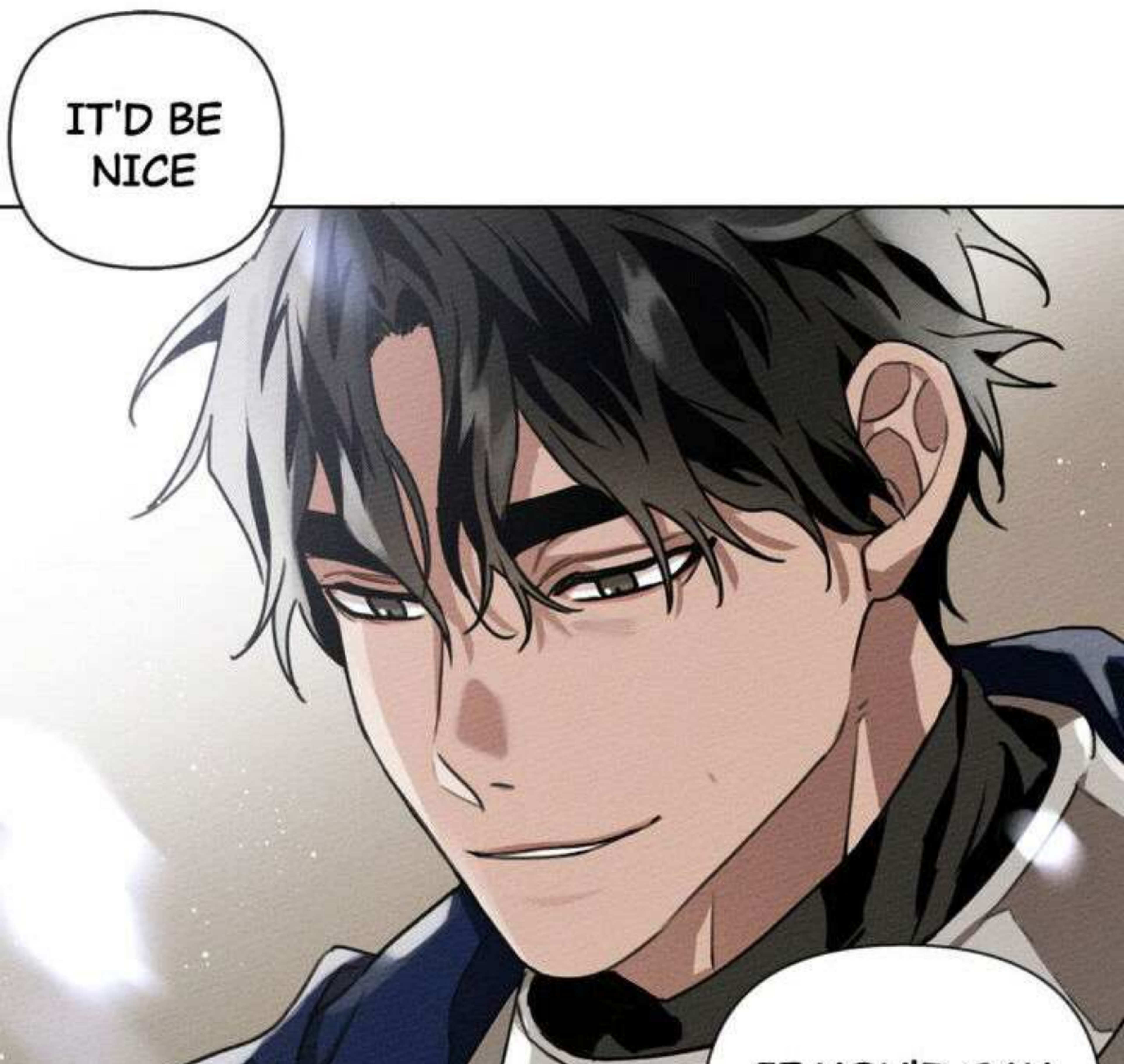

LUNCH TIME, EVERYONE!
DAZED..

... BUT,

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

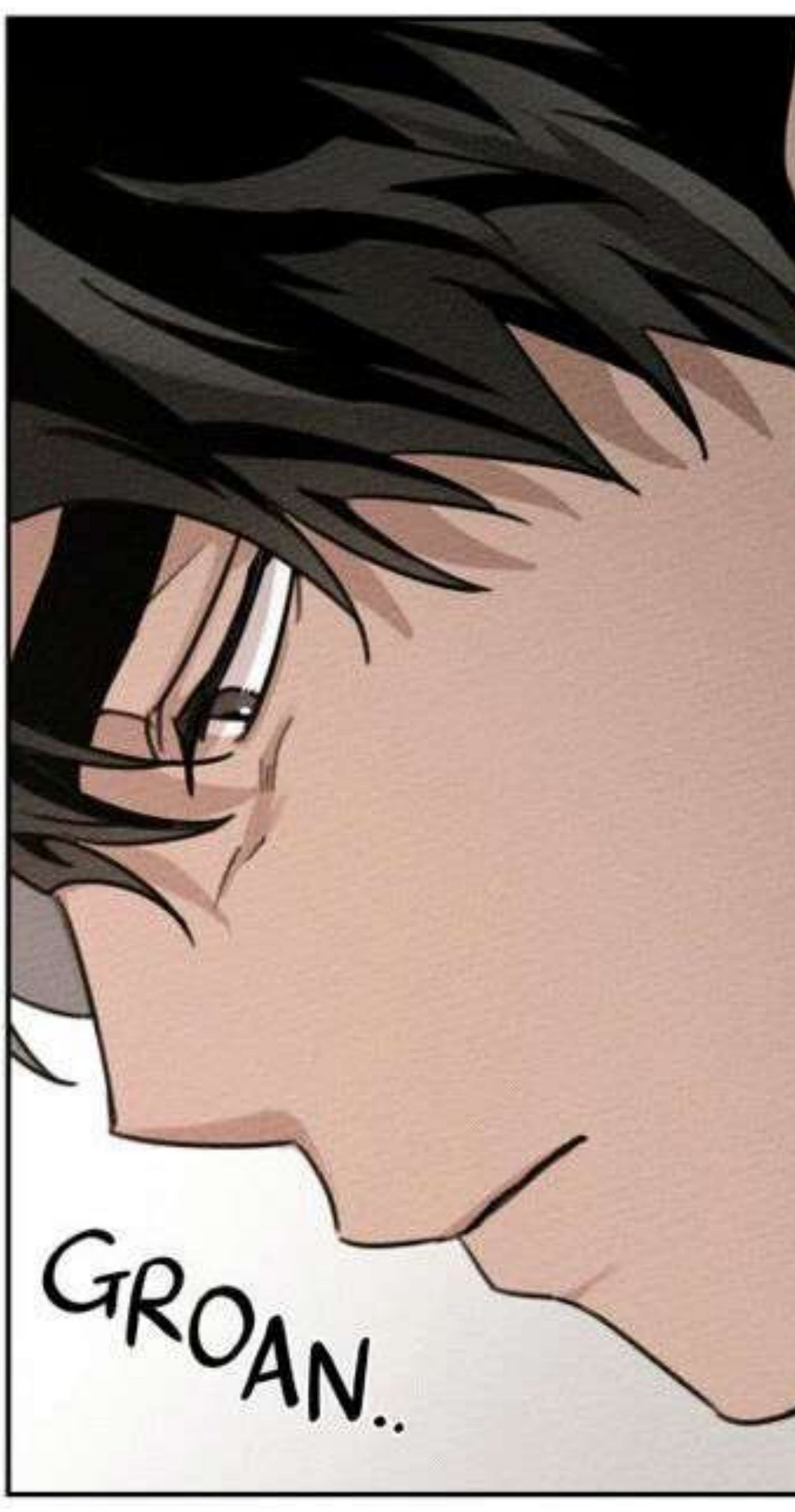

?

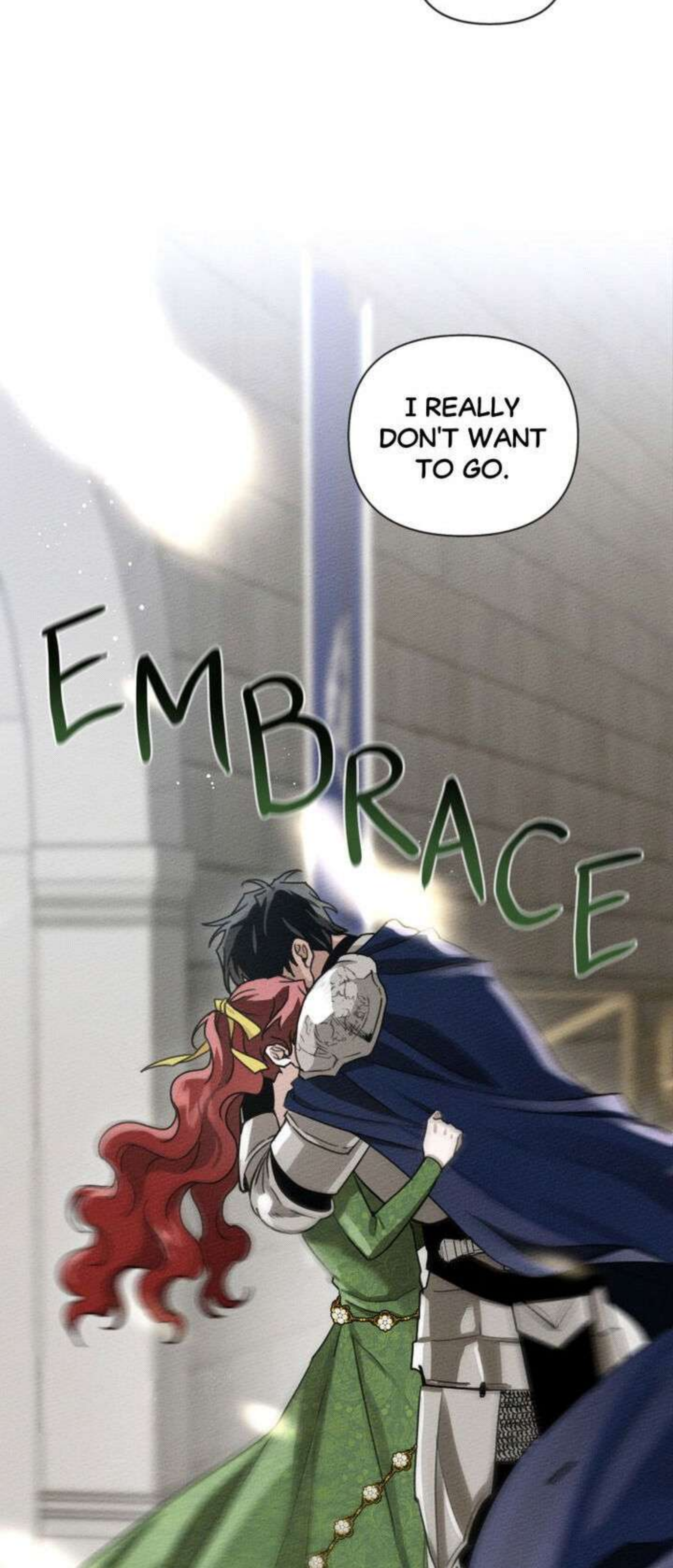

IT SEEMED LIKE IT HURT THE LAST TIME WE—
I-
I'M FINE!

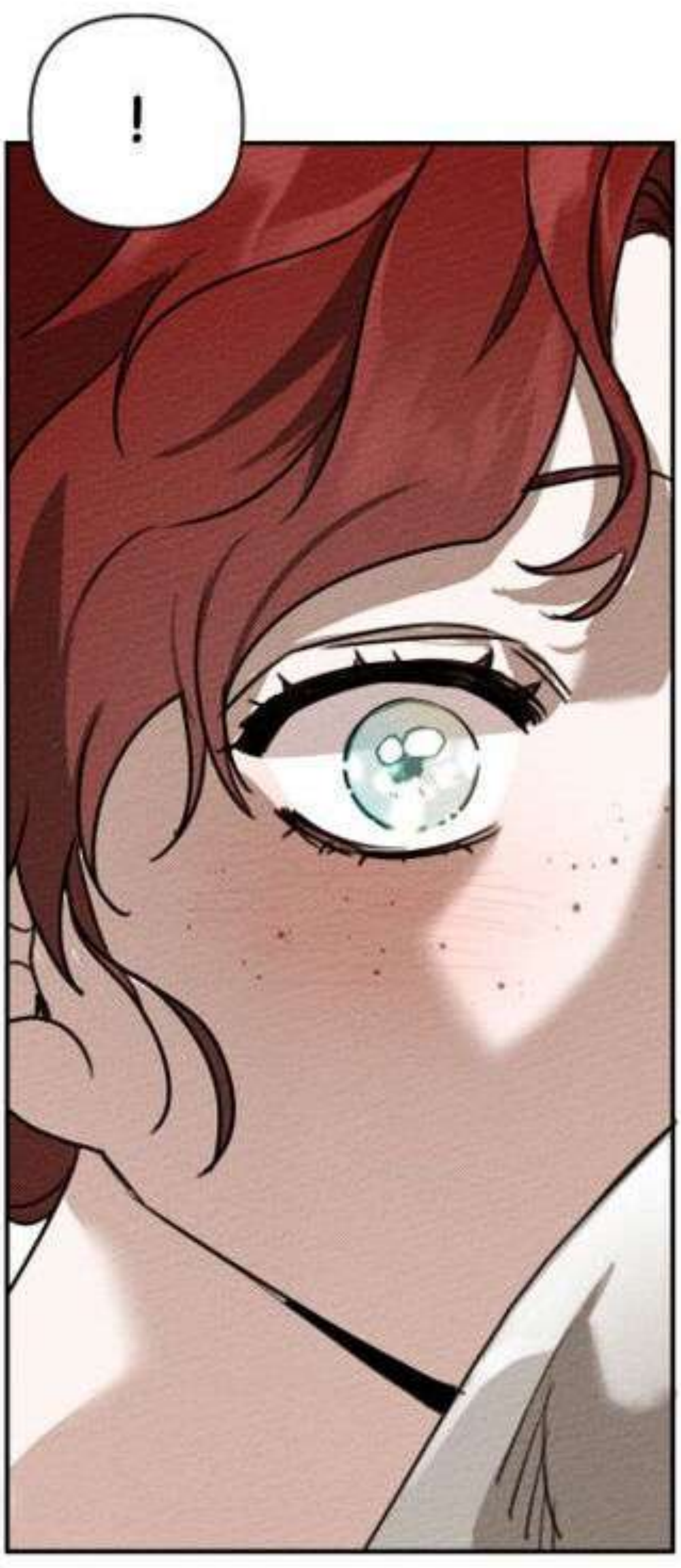

IT'D BE NICE
IF YOU'D SAY THAT IN BED AS WELL.
Y-YOU SHOULDN'T SAY S-SUCH THINGS...!
W-WHAT IF S-SOMEONE

SOMEONE HEARS...?

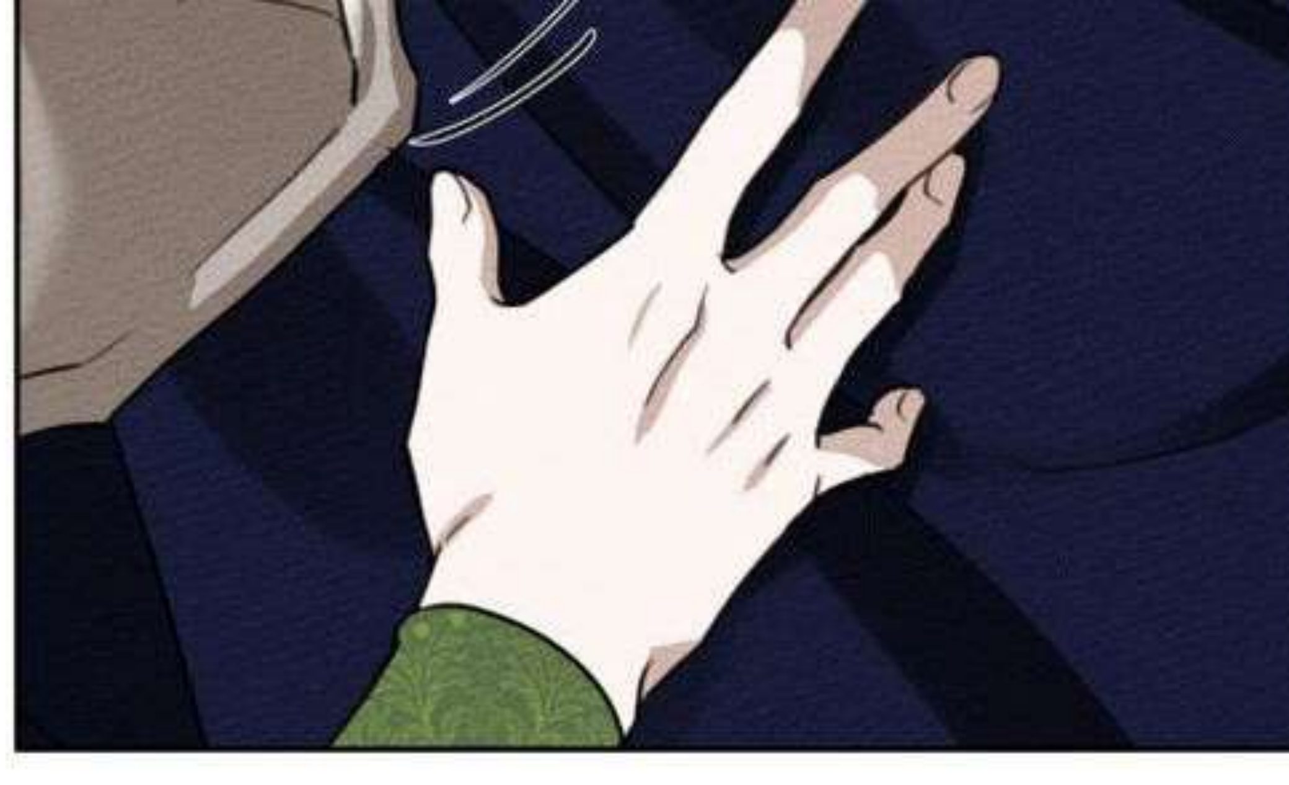
MY INNOCENT LADY.

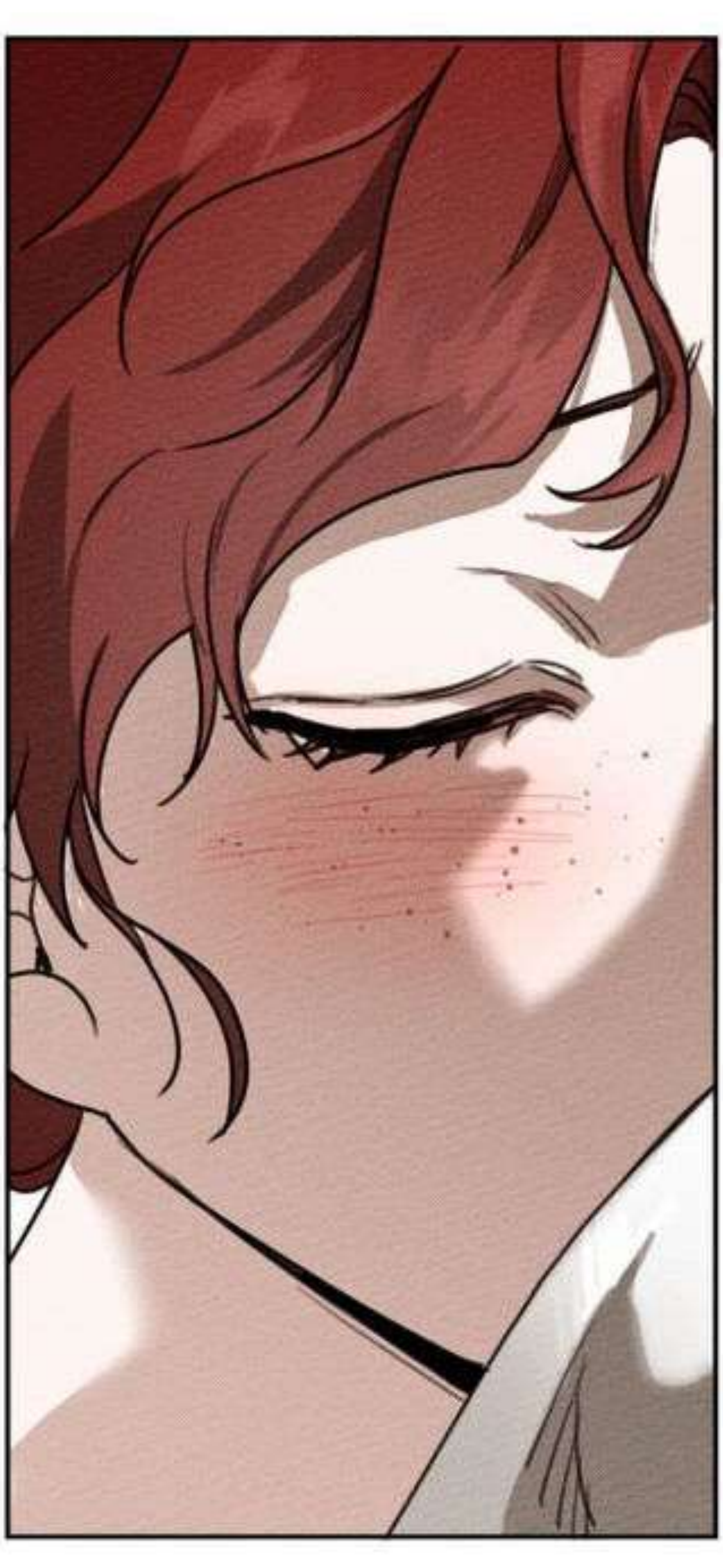

GROAN..

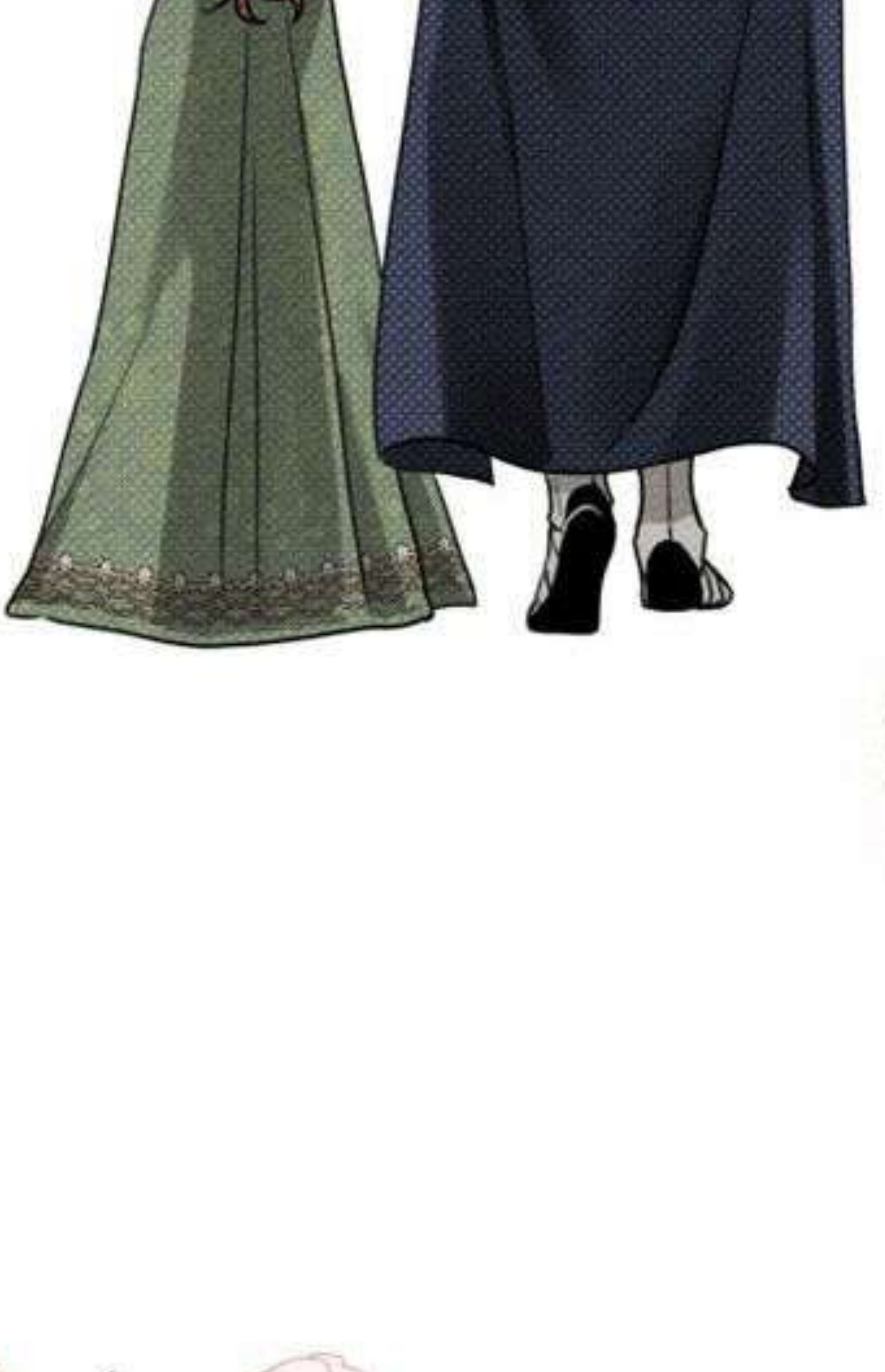

DAMN IT.
I REALLY DON'T WANT TO GO.
EMBRACE

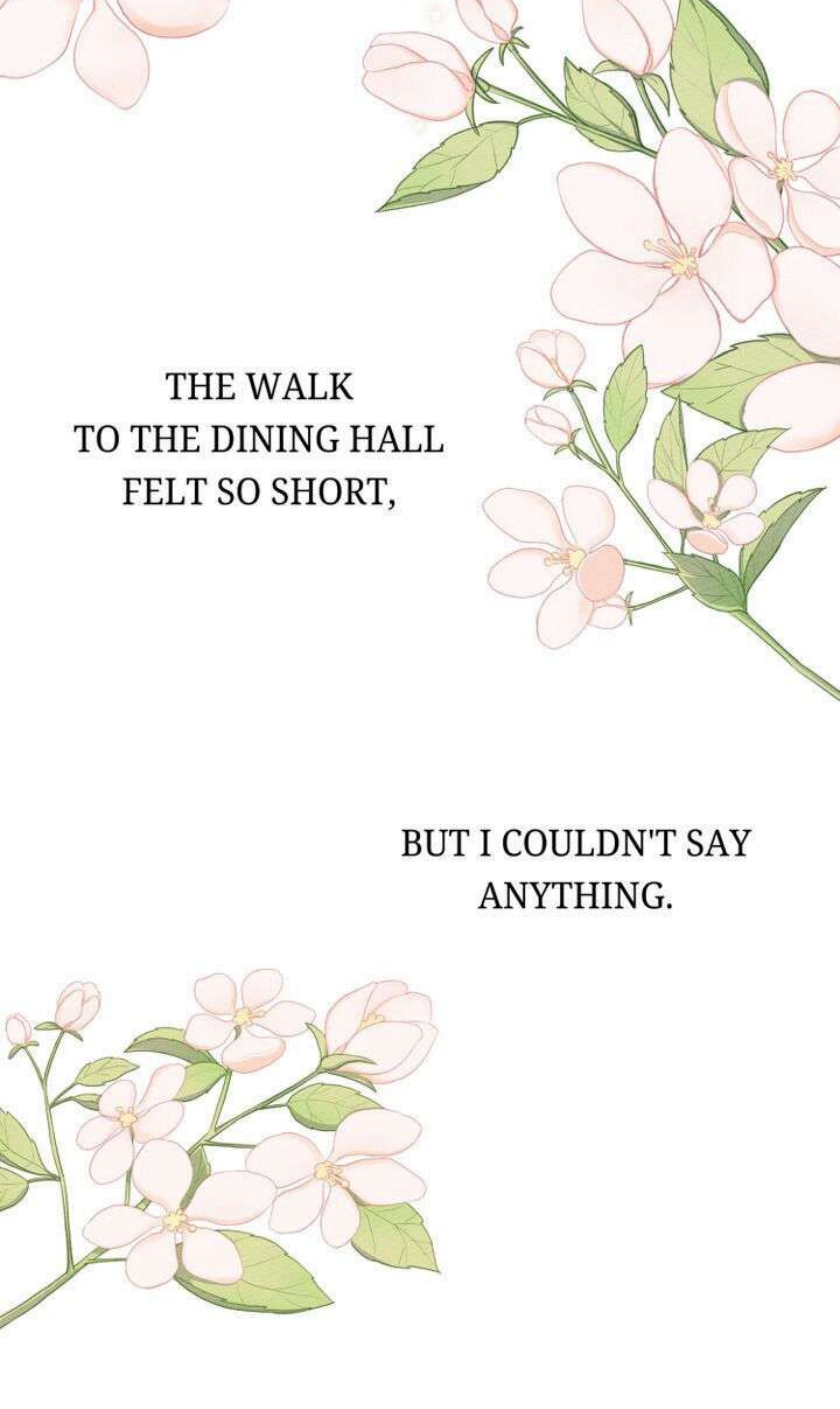


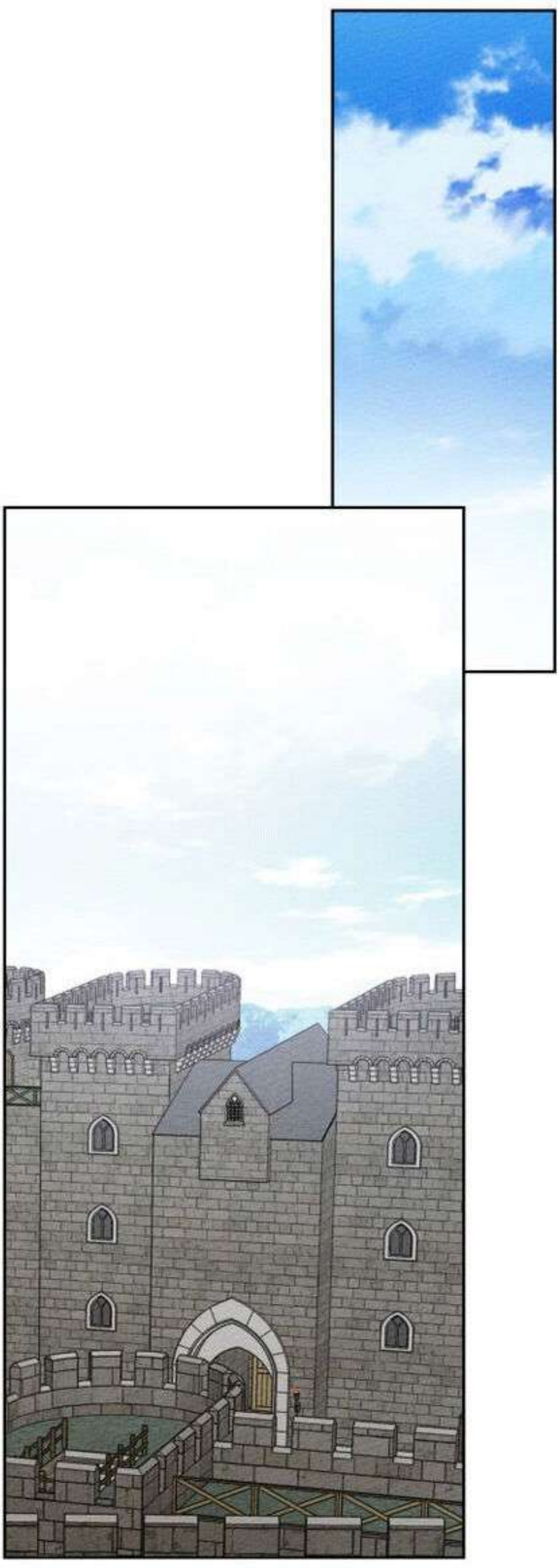
I KNOW
HE HAS
TO LEAVE
SOON...

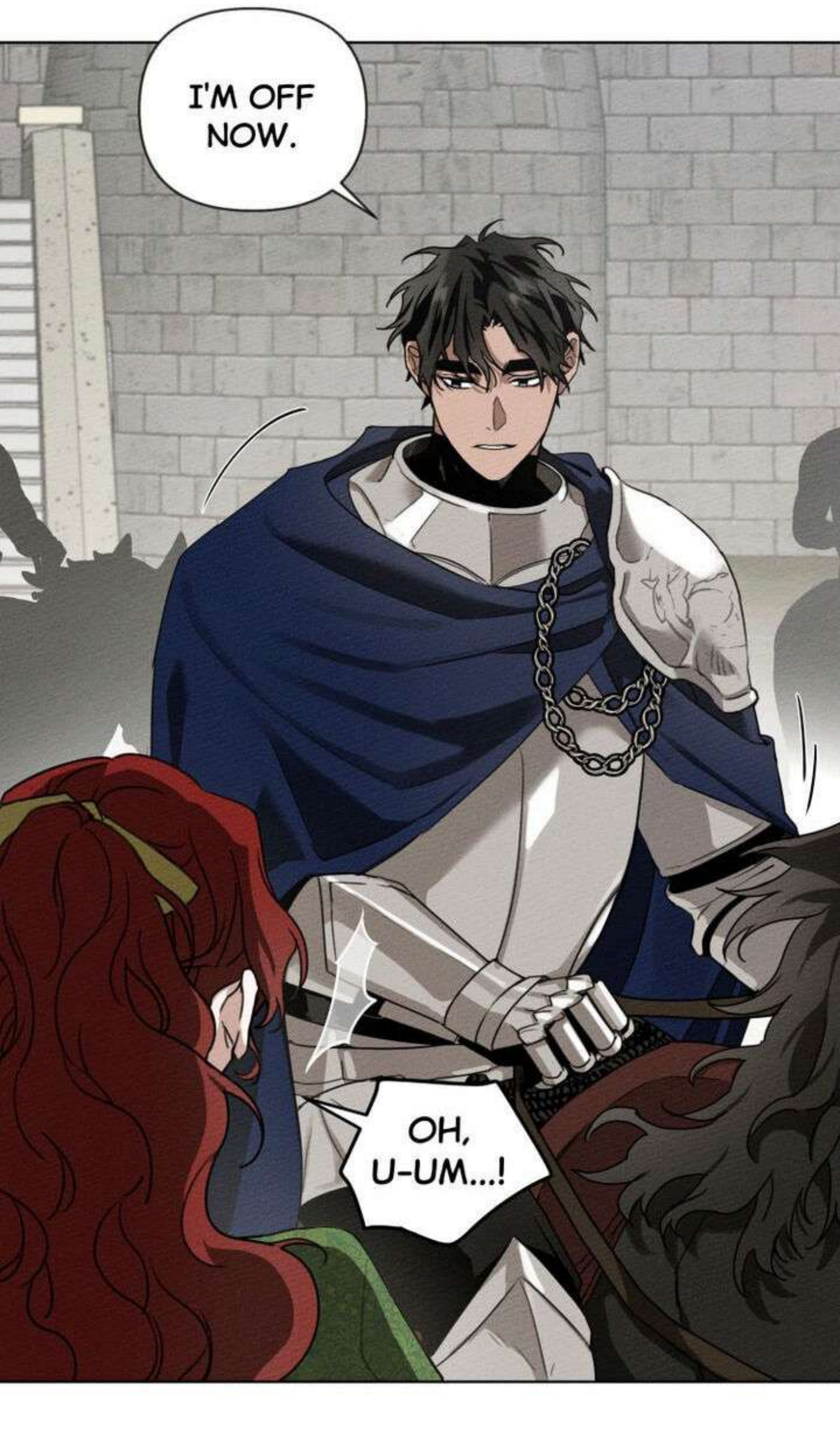


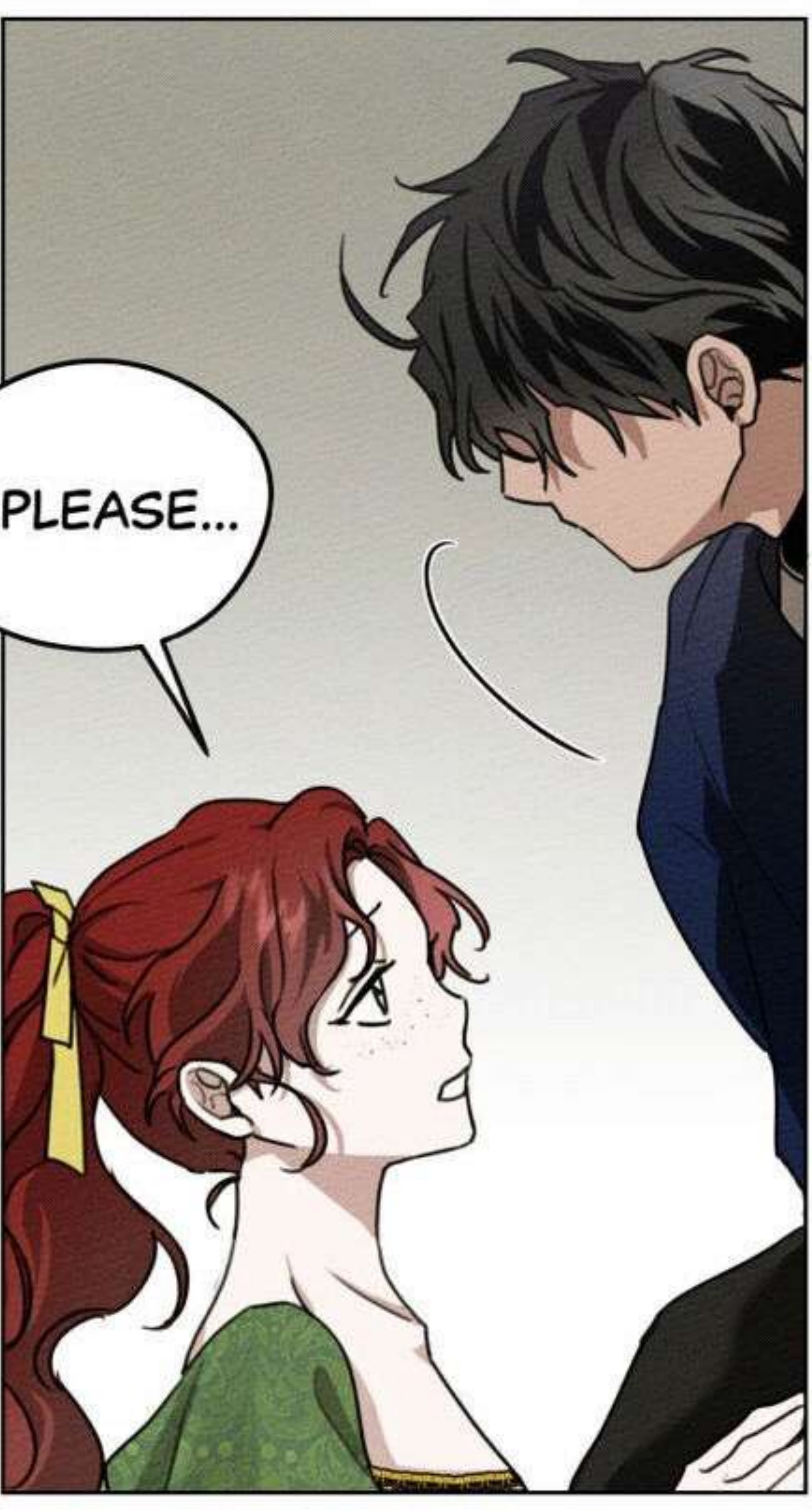

I WANT TO STAY LIKE THIS A BIT LONGER...
W-WE SHOULD HURRY T-TO LUNCH...
E-EVERYONE IS W-WAITING.
YES, LET'S GO.

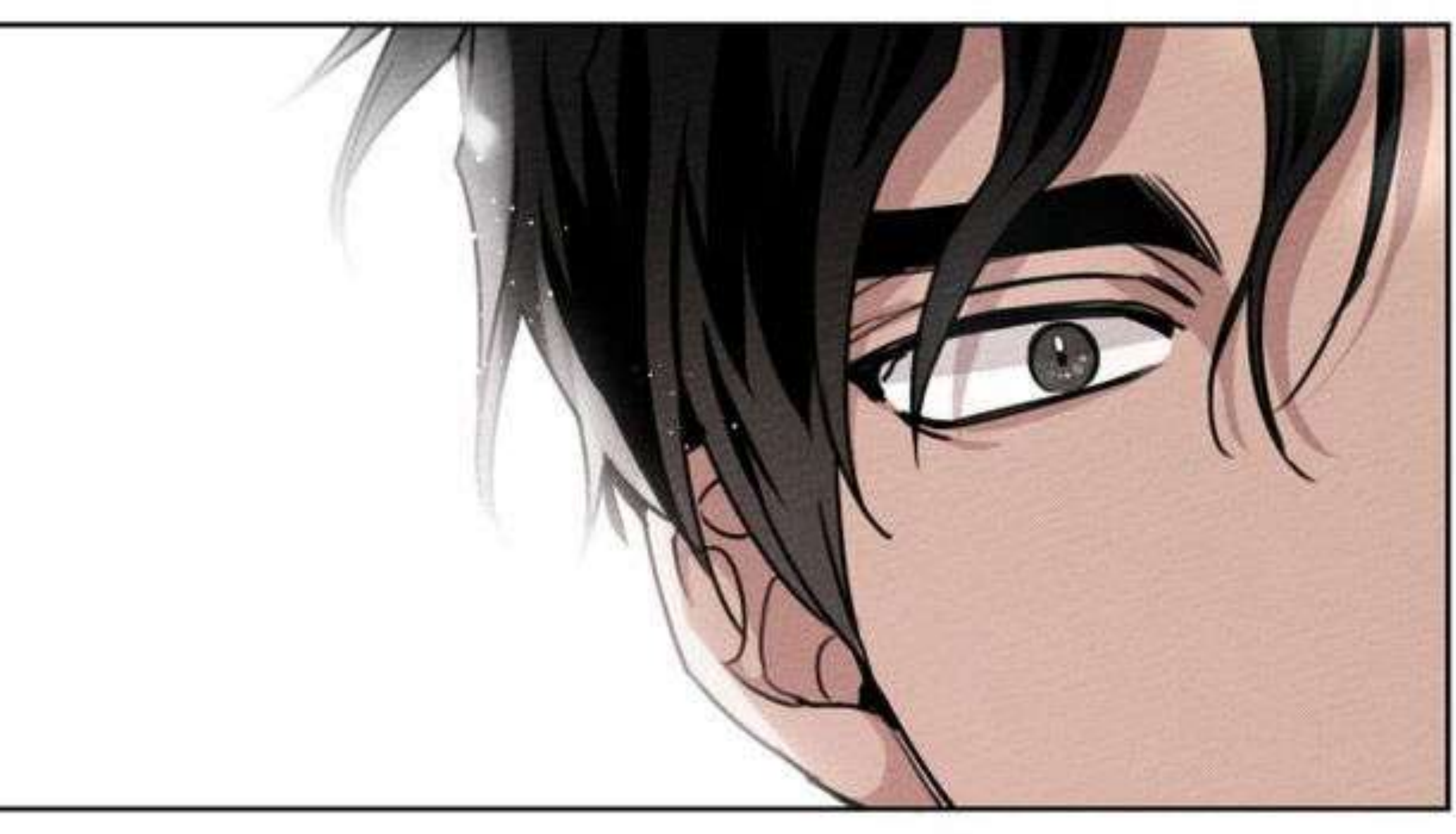


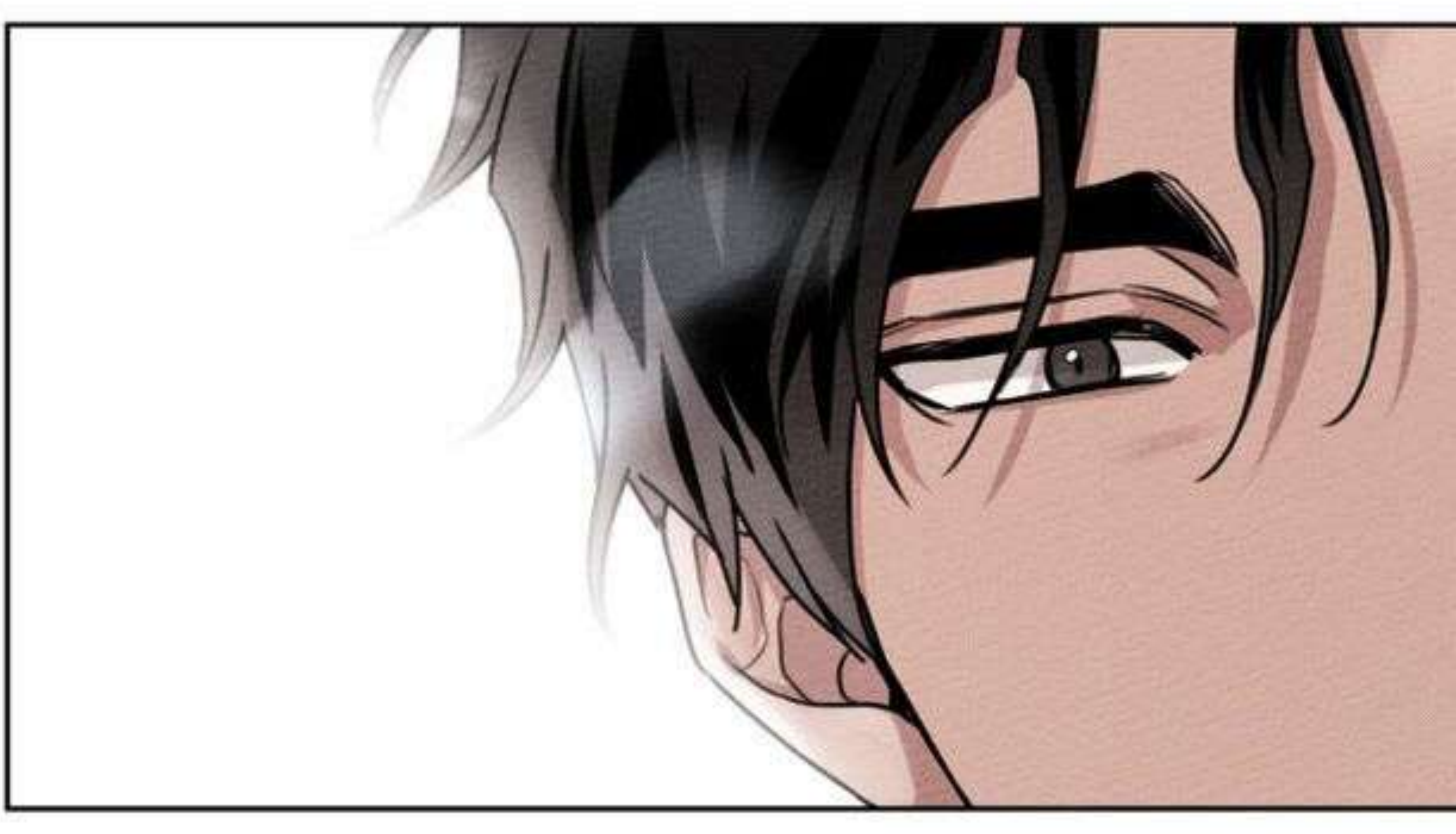

THE WALK TO THE DINING HALL FELT SO SHORT,
BUT I COULDN'T SAY ANYTHING.

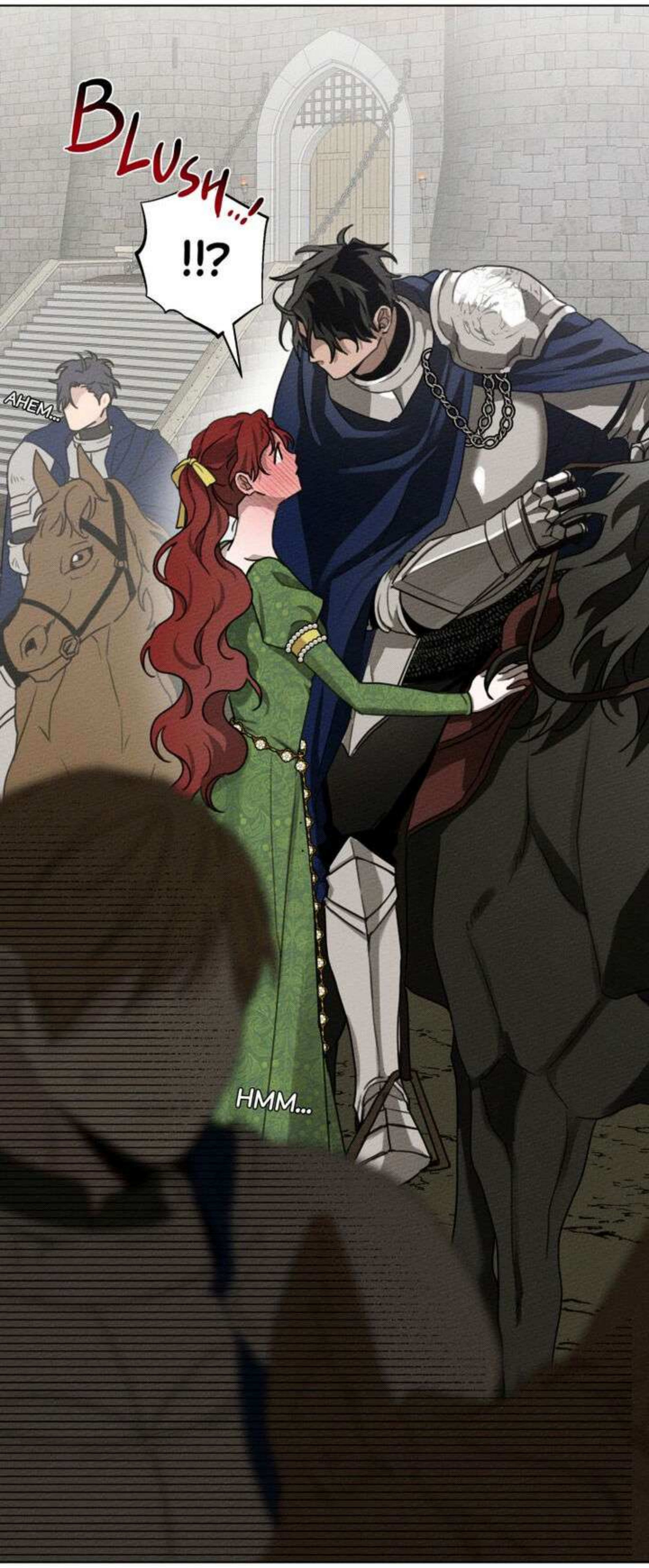


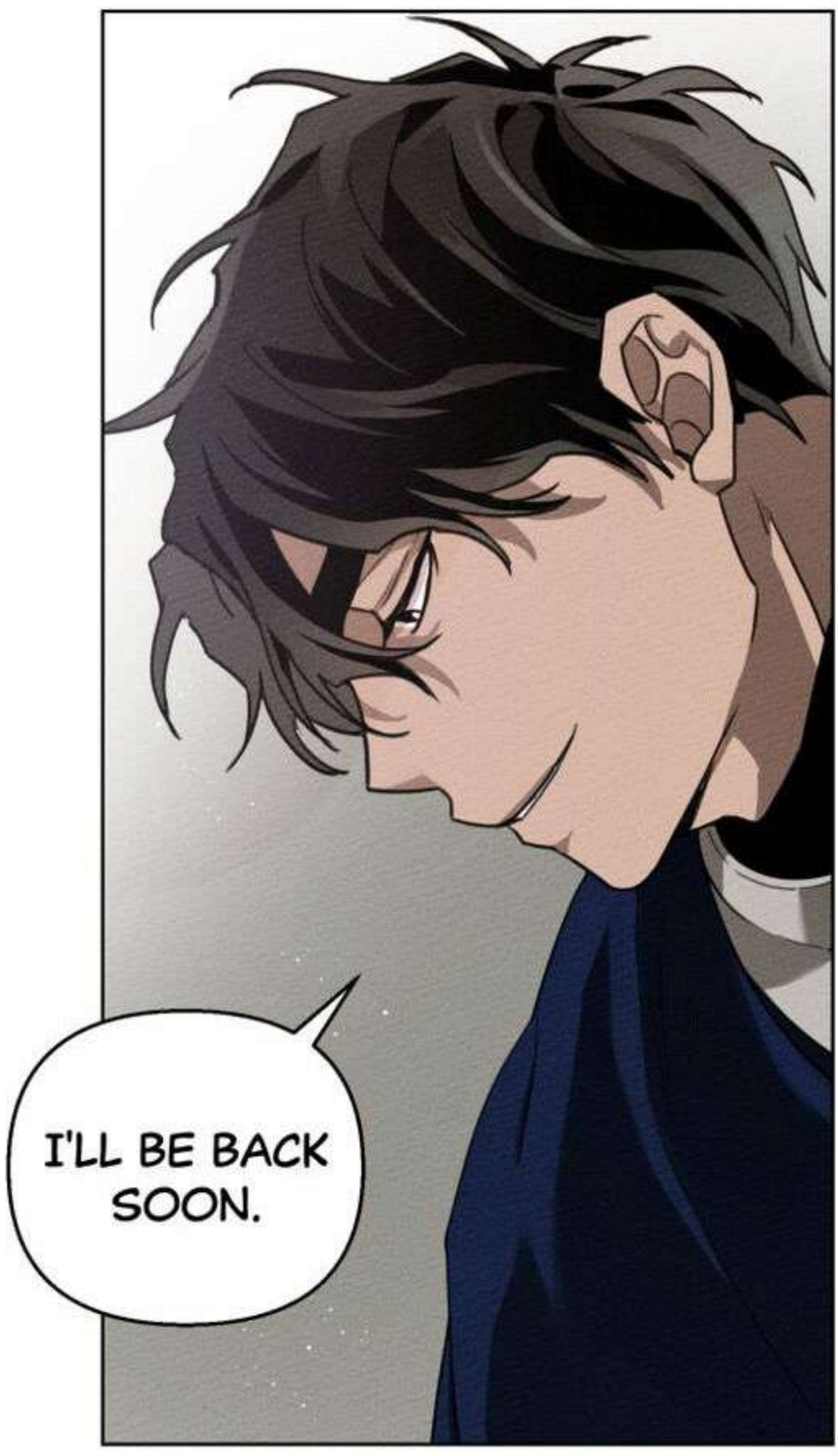

I'M OFF NOW.
OH, U-UM...!

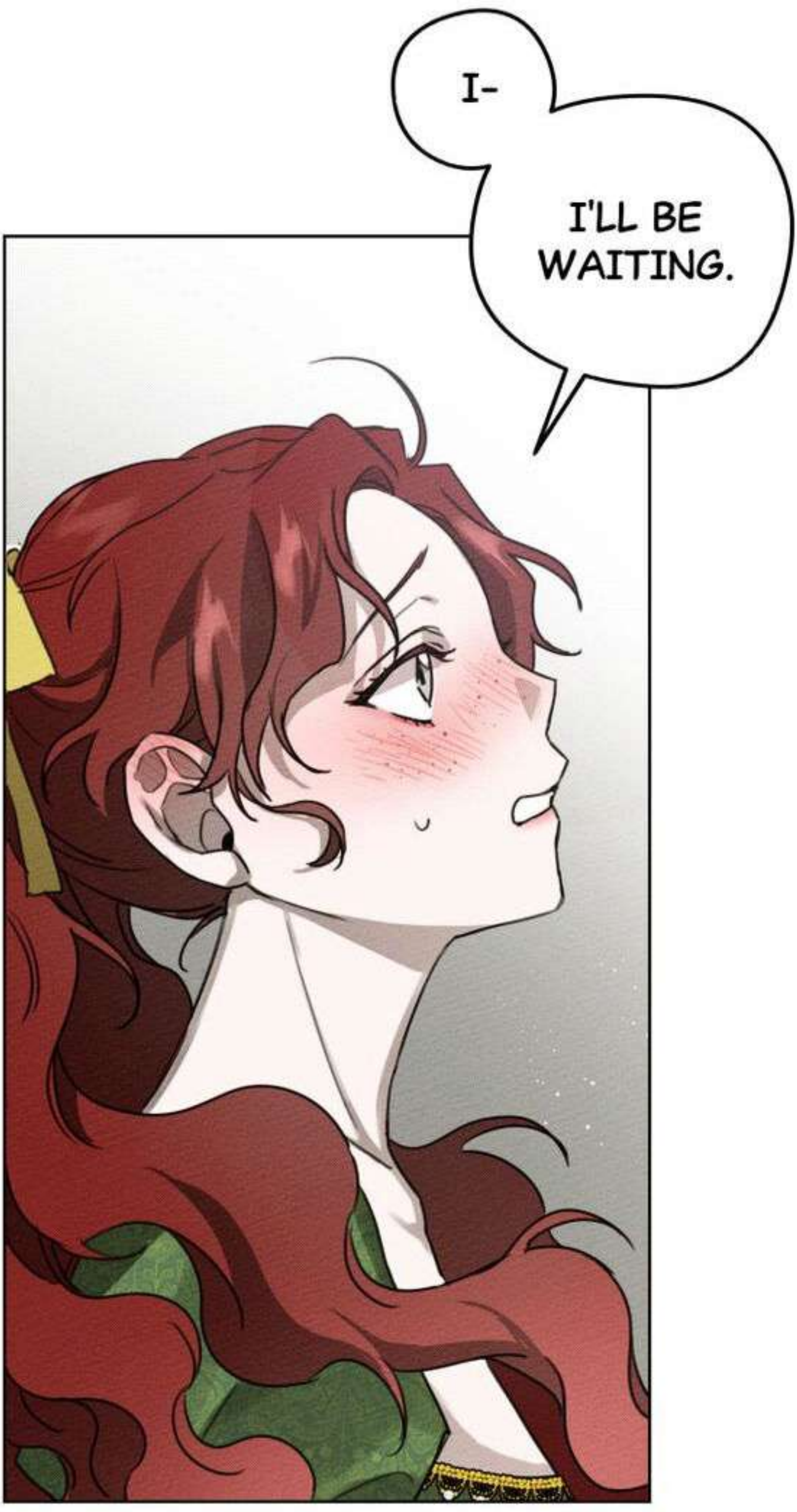

HMM?
P-PLEASE...
B-BE CAREFUL.

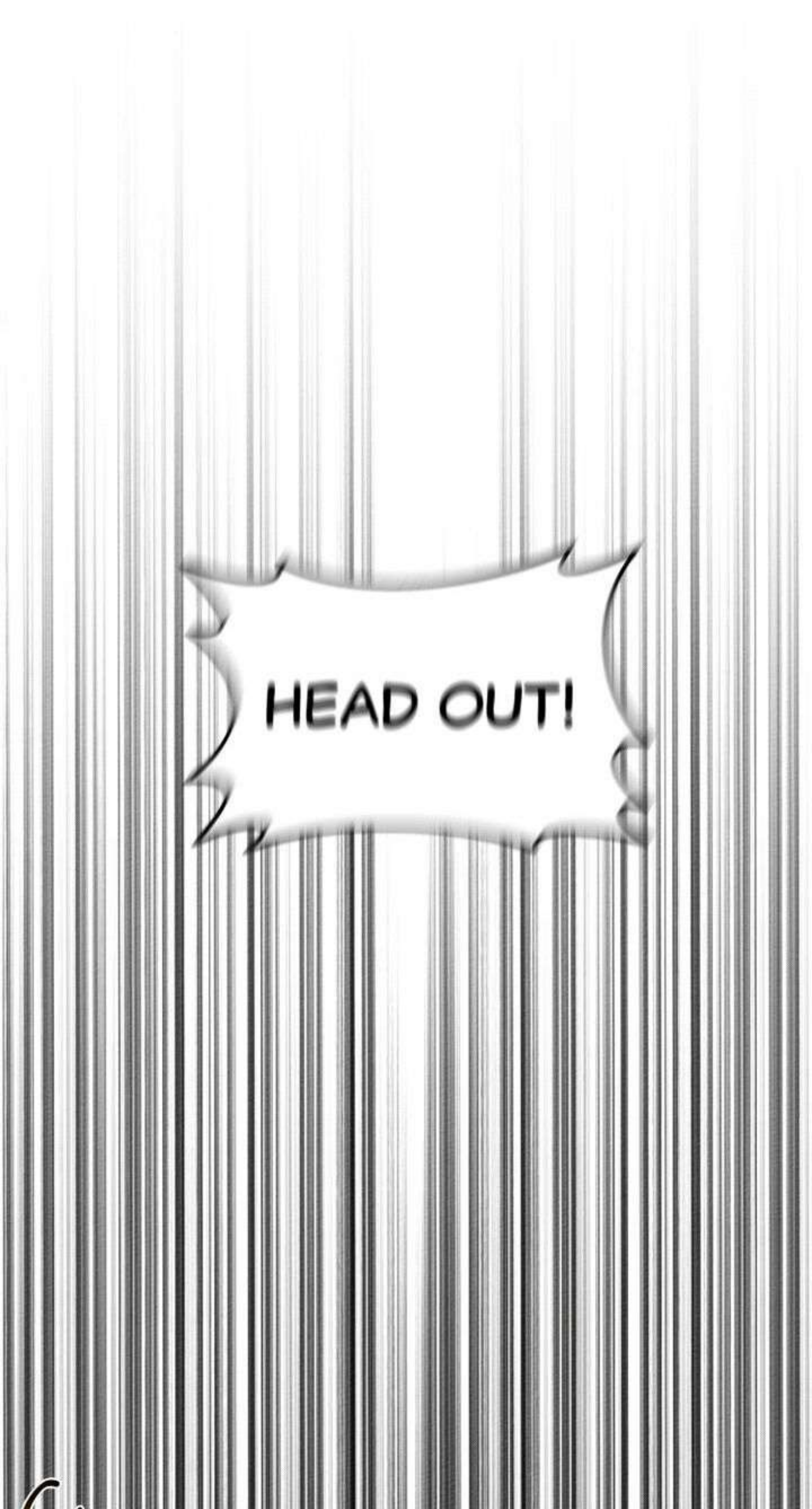



IT'S NICE TO HEAR THOSE WORDS.

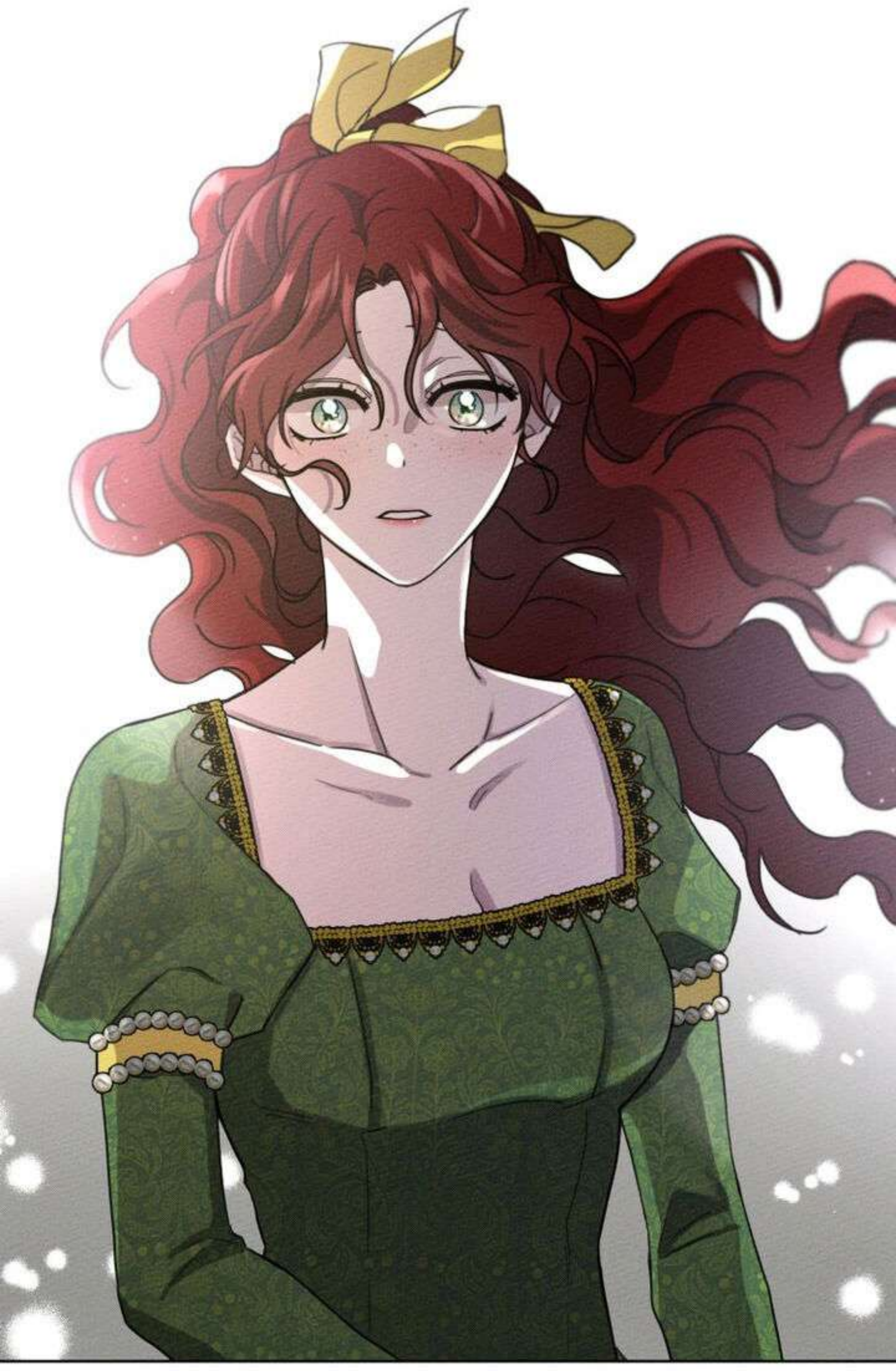

BLUSH..!
!!?
AHEM...
HMM...


I'LL BE BACK SOON.

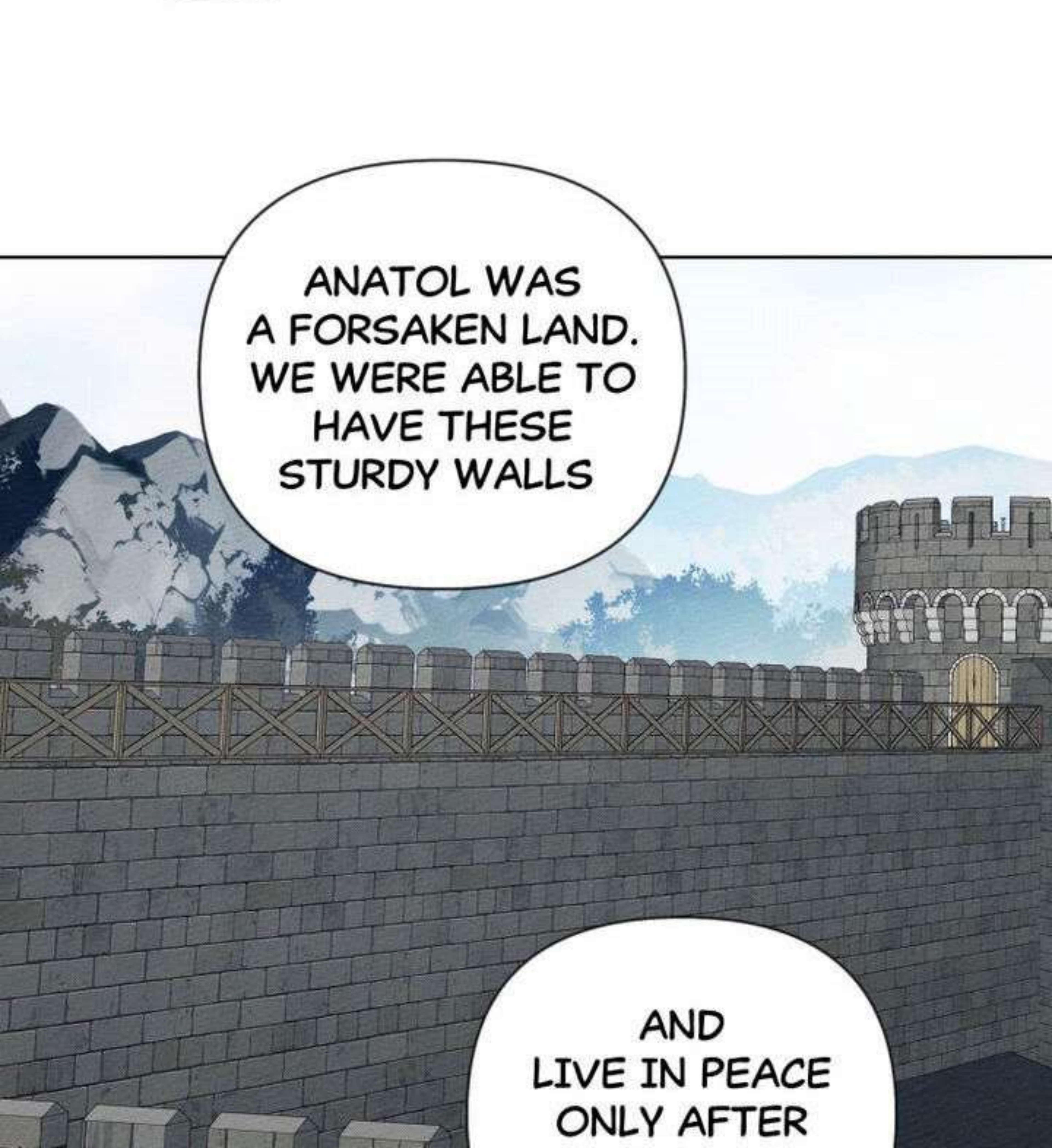

I-
I'LL BE WAITING.
... GOOD.

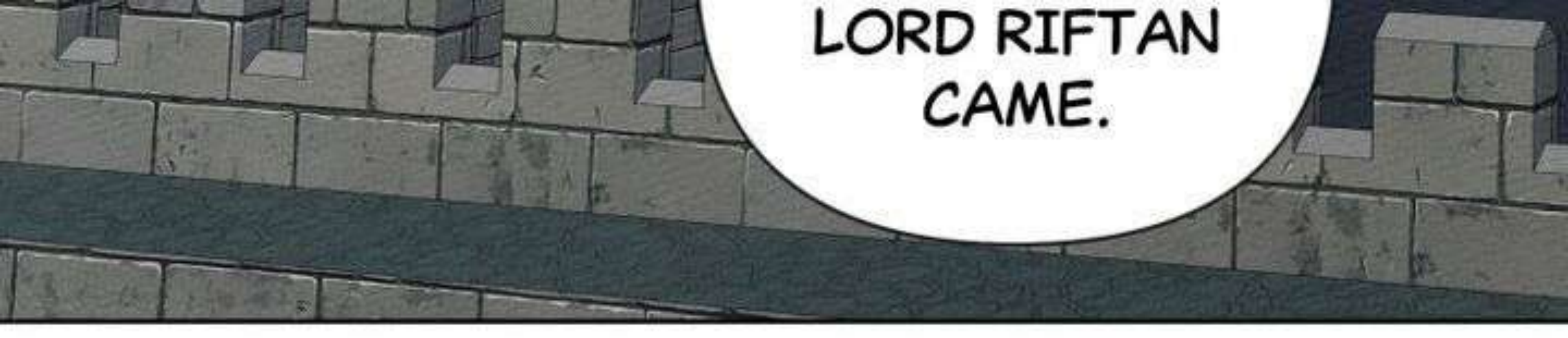

HEAD OUT!
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP

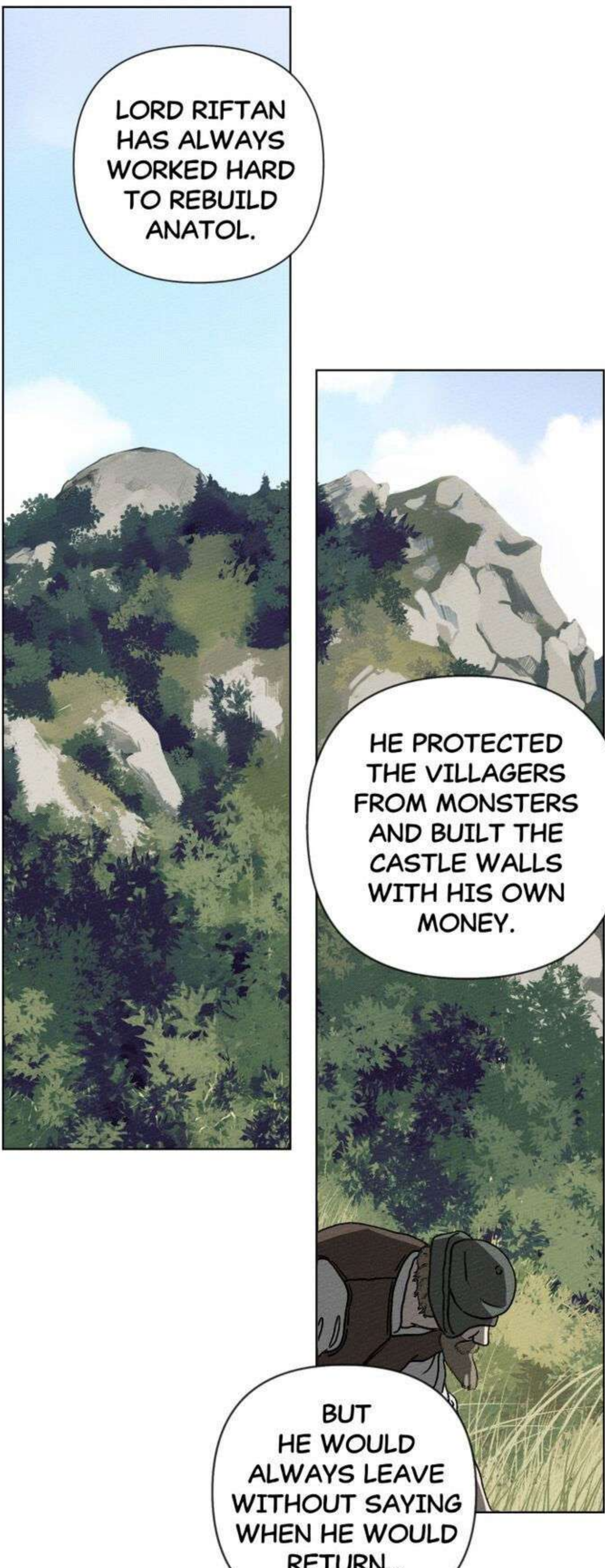
IT'S ALL THANKS TO YOU, MY LADY.

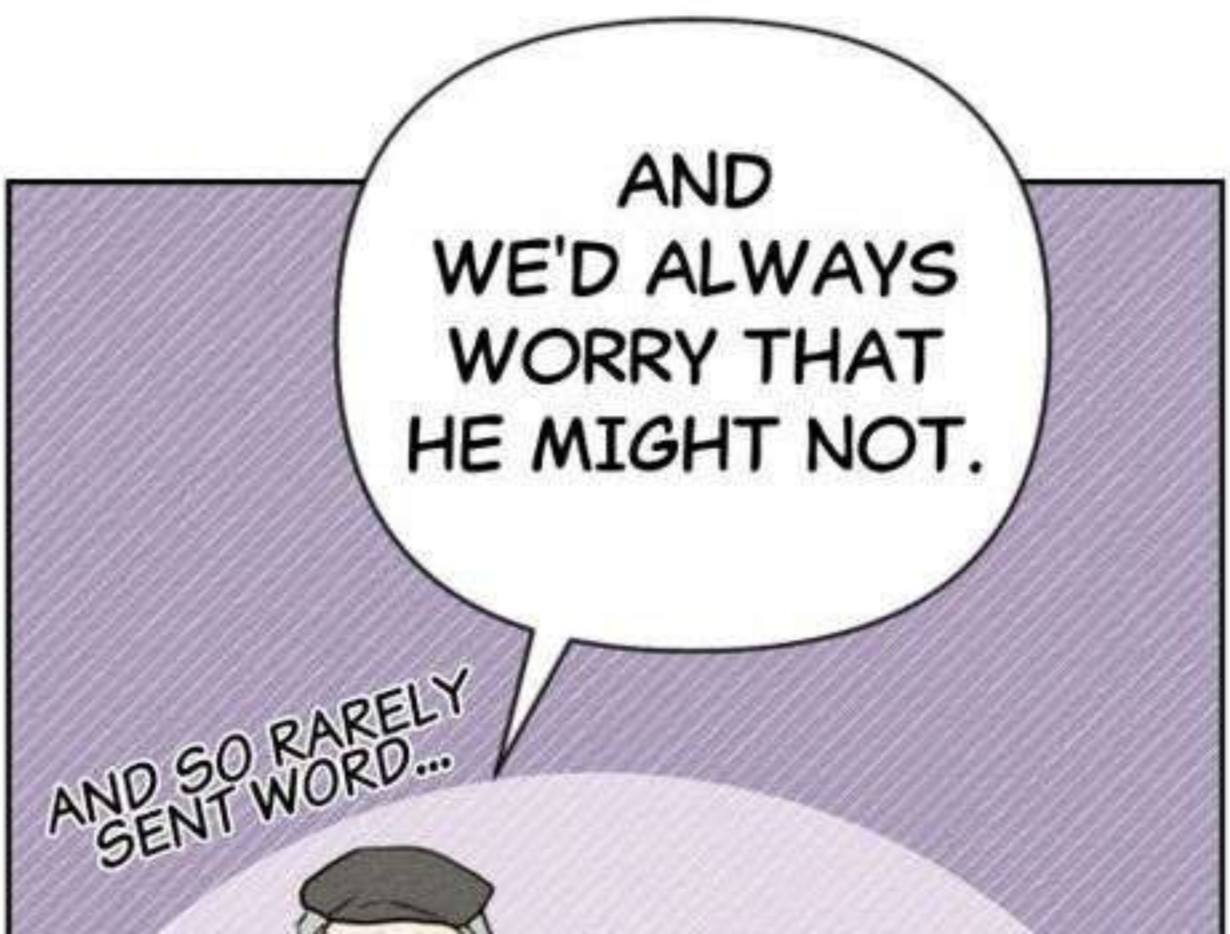


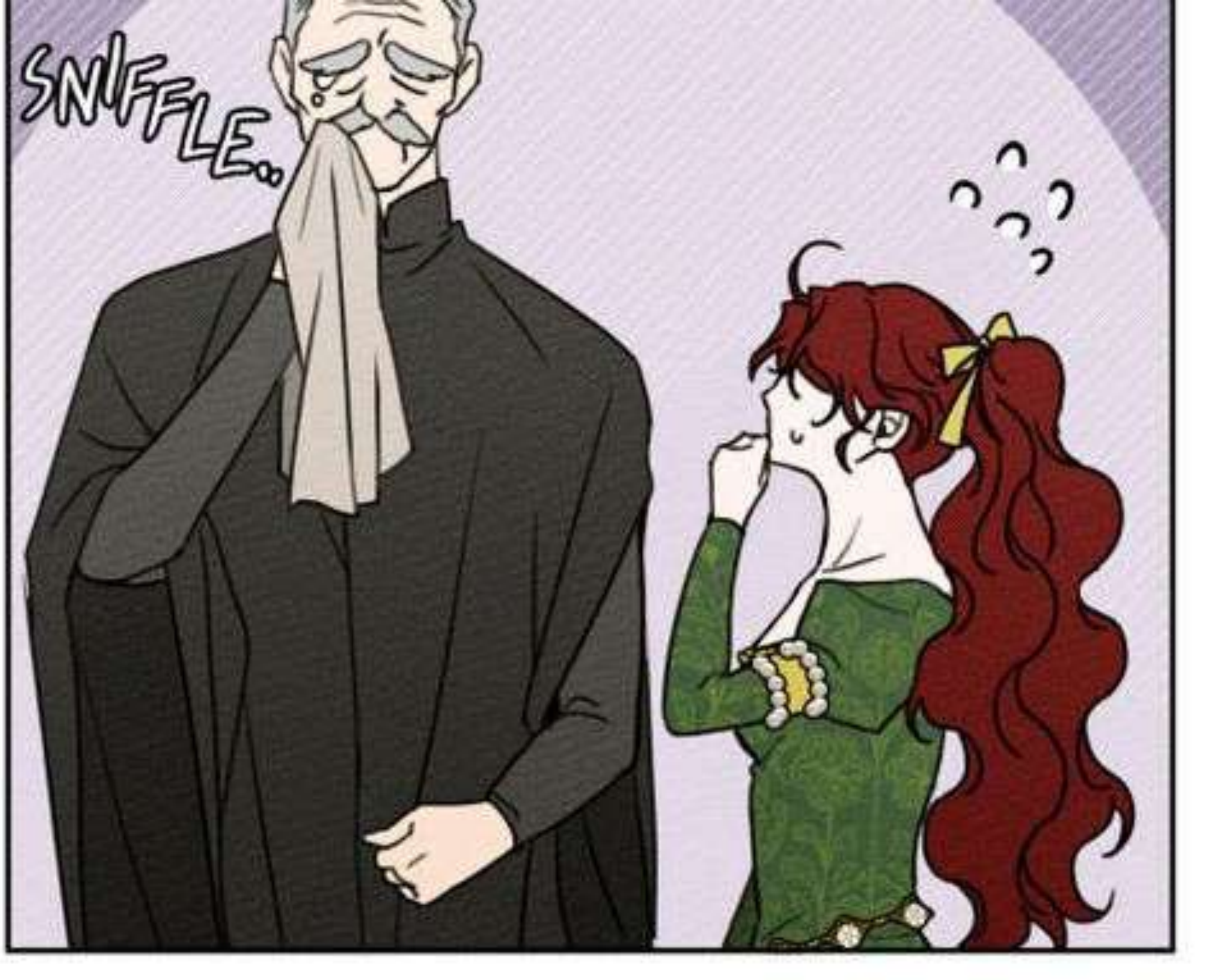
IN TRUTH,

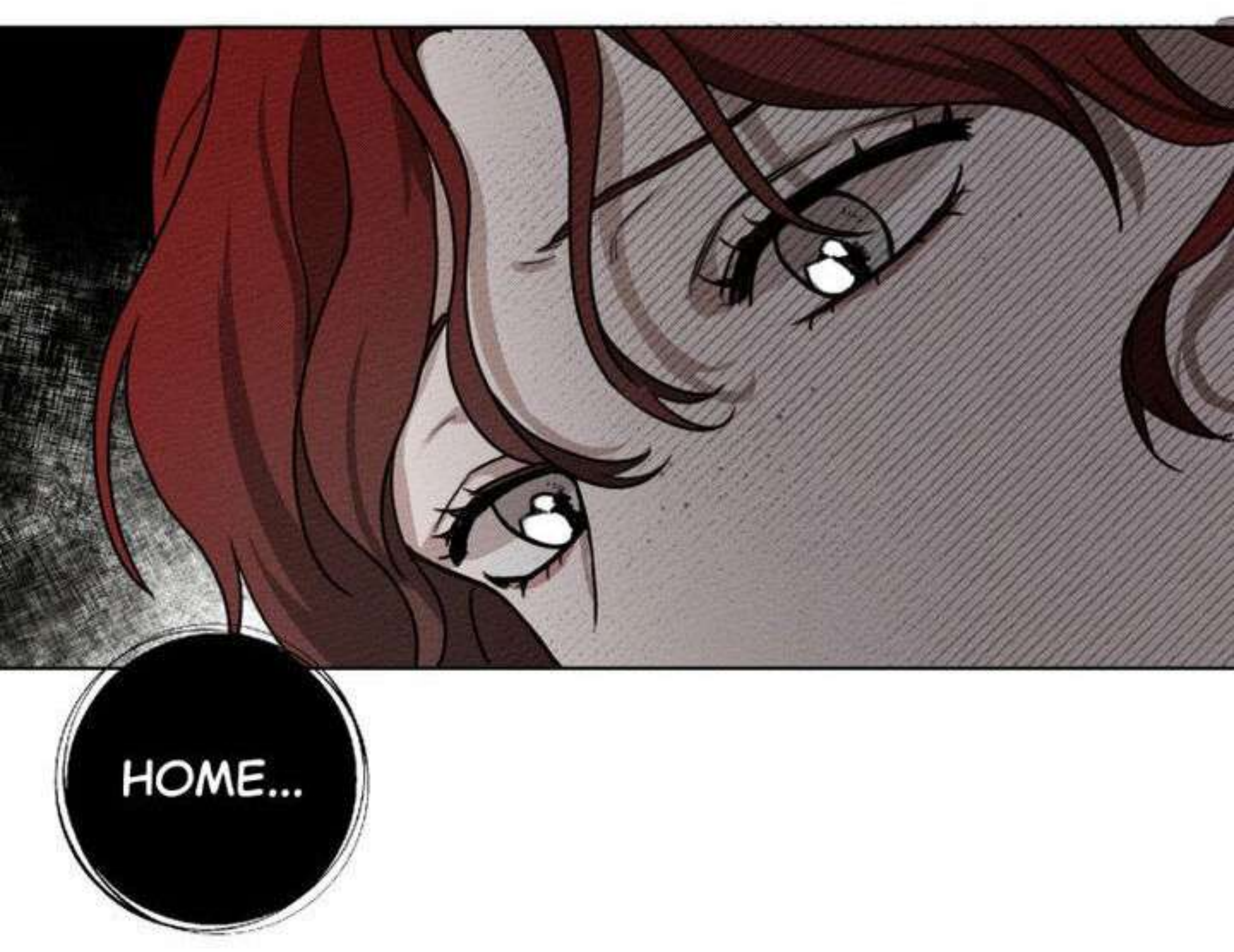

ANATOL WAS A FORSAKEN LAND. WE WERE ABLE TO HAVE THESE STURDY WALLS
AND LIVE IN PEACE ONLY AFTER

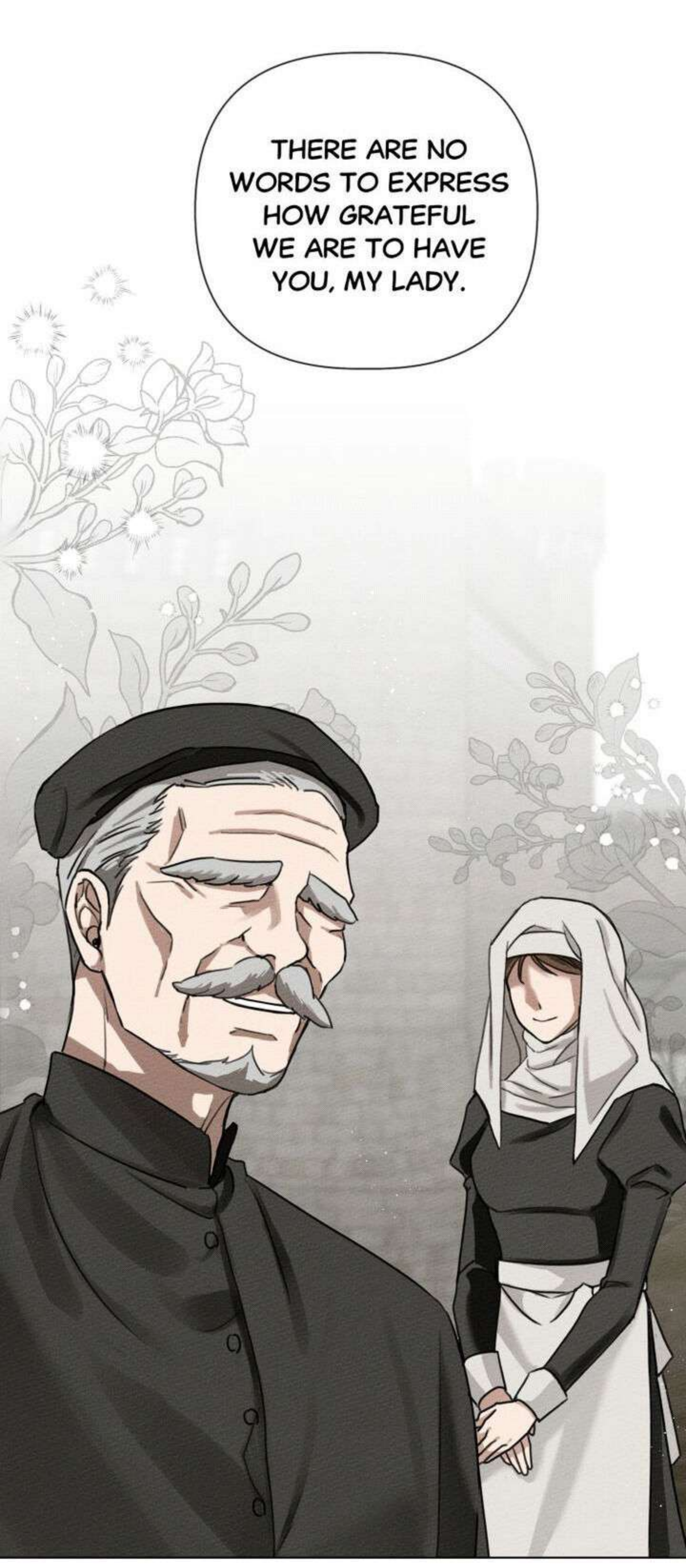

LORD RIFTAN CAME.


LORD RIFTAN HAS ALWAYS WORKED HARD TO REBUILD ANATOL.
HE PROTECTED THE VILLAGERS FROM MONSTERS AND BUILT THE CASTLE WALLS WITH HIS OWN MONEY.
BUT HE WOULD ALWAYS LEAVE WITHOUT SAYING WHEN HE WOULD RETURN...


AND WE'D ALWAYS WORRY THAT HE MIGHT NOT.
AND SO RARELY SENT WORD...


SNIFFLE...
SINCE YOUR ARRIVAL, I THINK THE LORD HAS STARTED TO TRULY THINK OF ANATOL AS HOME...


HOME...

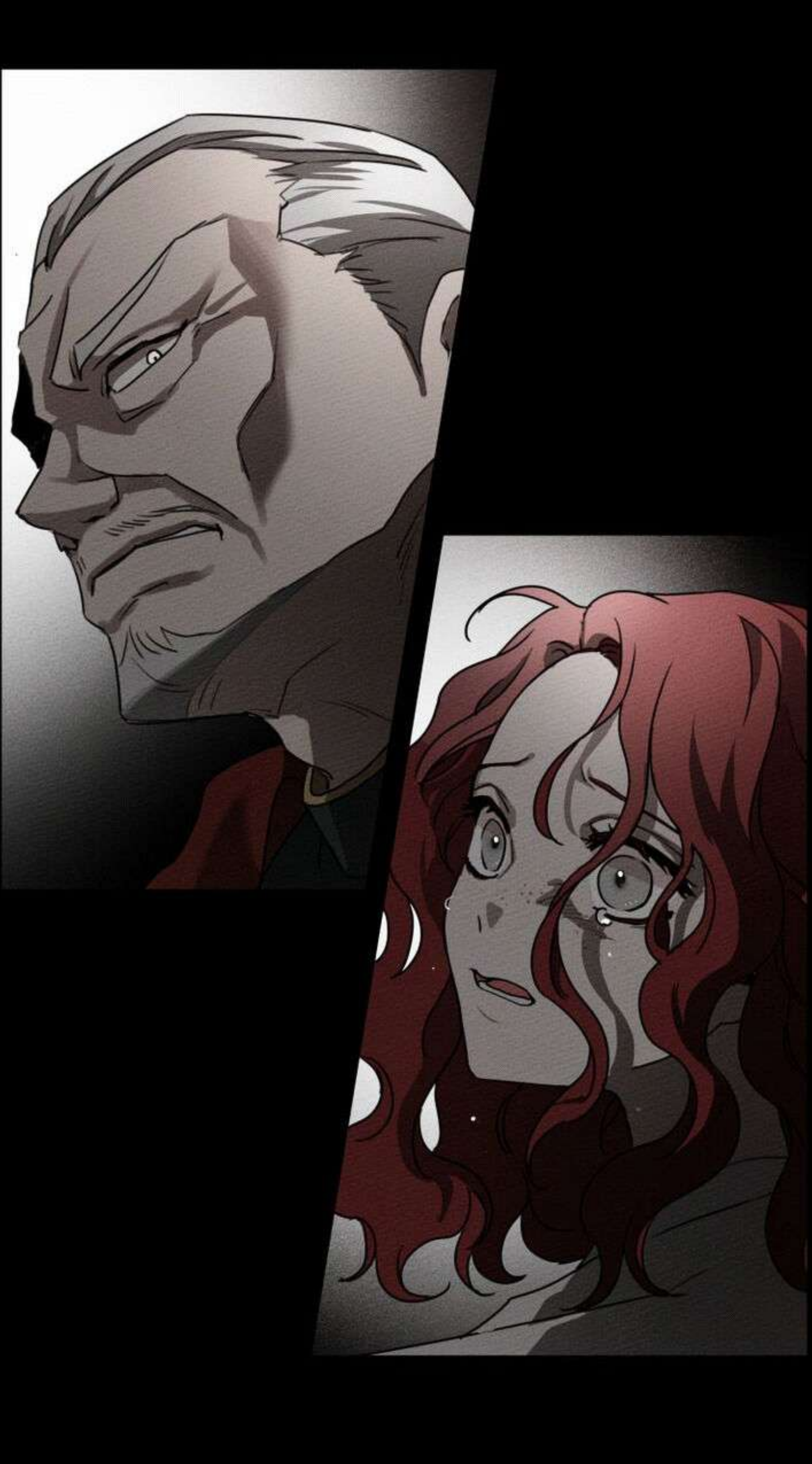

THERE ARE NO WORDS TO EXPRESS HOW GRATEFUL WE ARE TO HAVE YOU, MY LADY.

DO I DESERVE TO HEAR SUCH WORDS?
I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING FOR RIFTAN...
IF THEY FIND OUT JUST HOW USELESS I AM...

EVEN RIFTAN

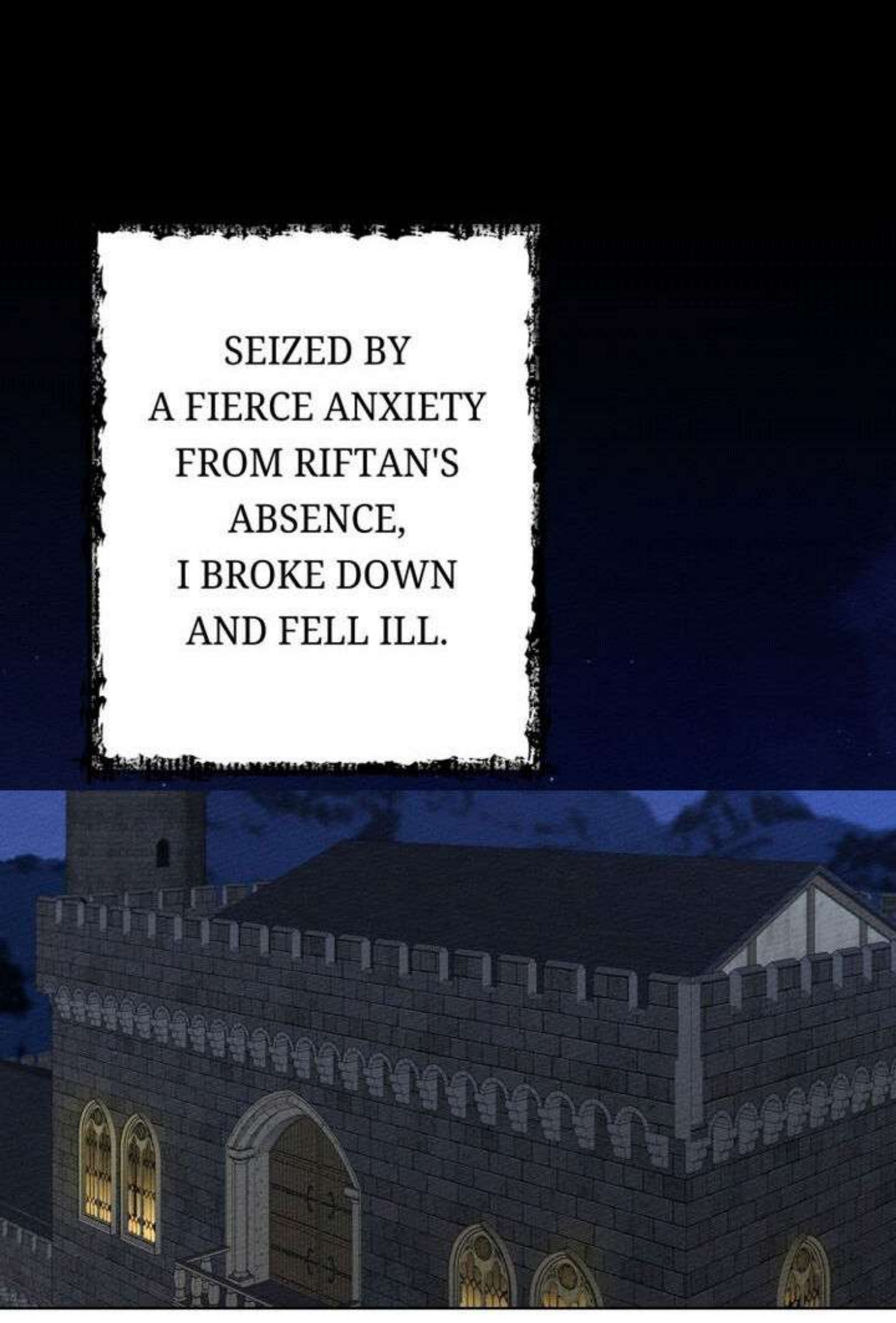
AND EVERYONE ELSE HERE

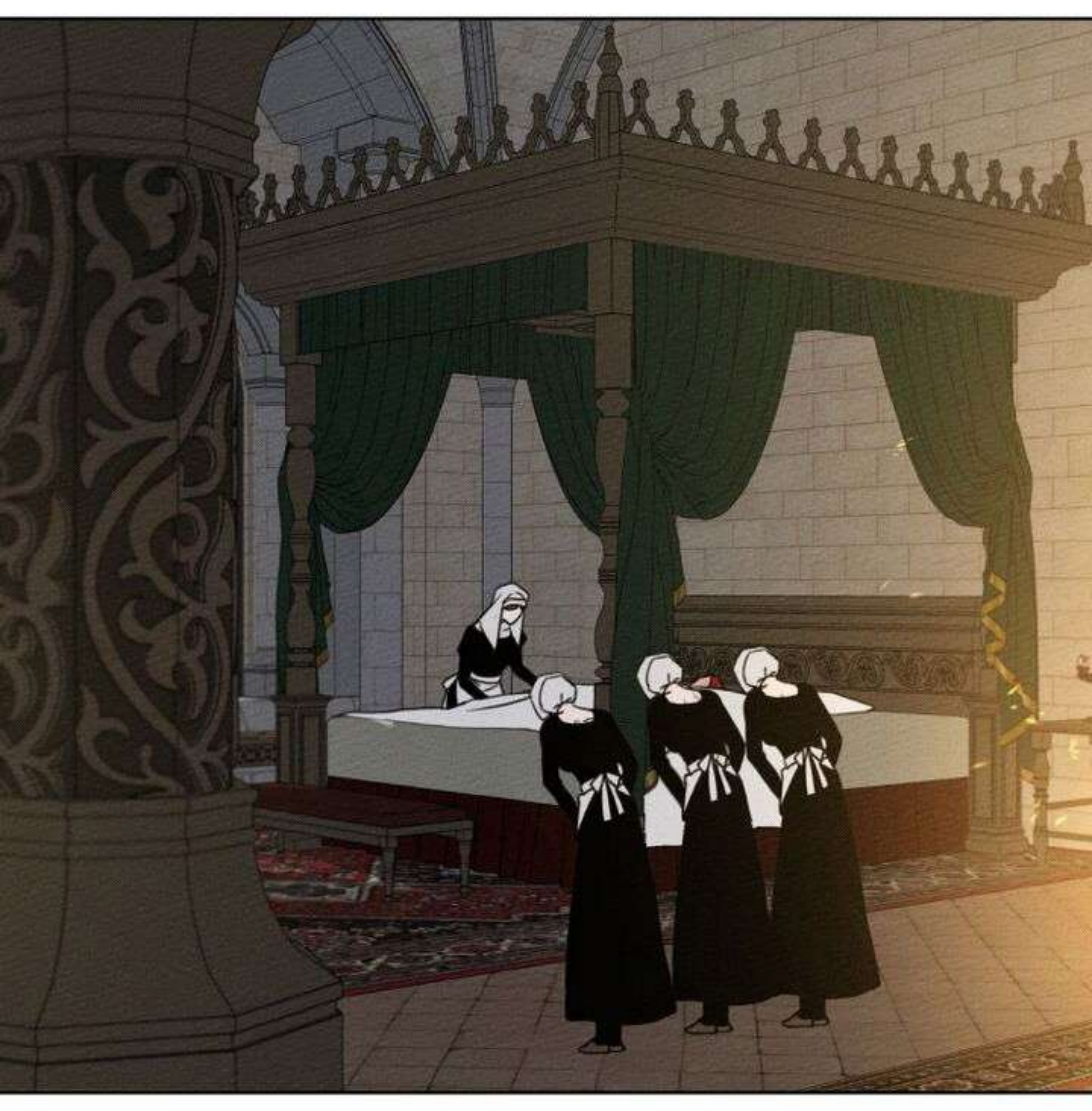
COULD TURN AGAINST ME LIKE FATHER.

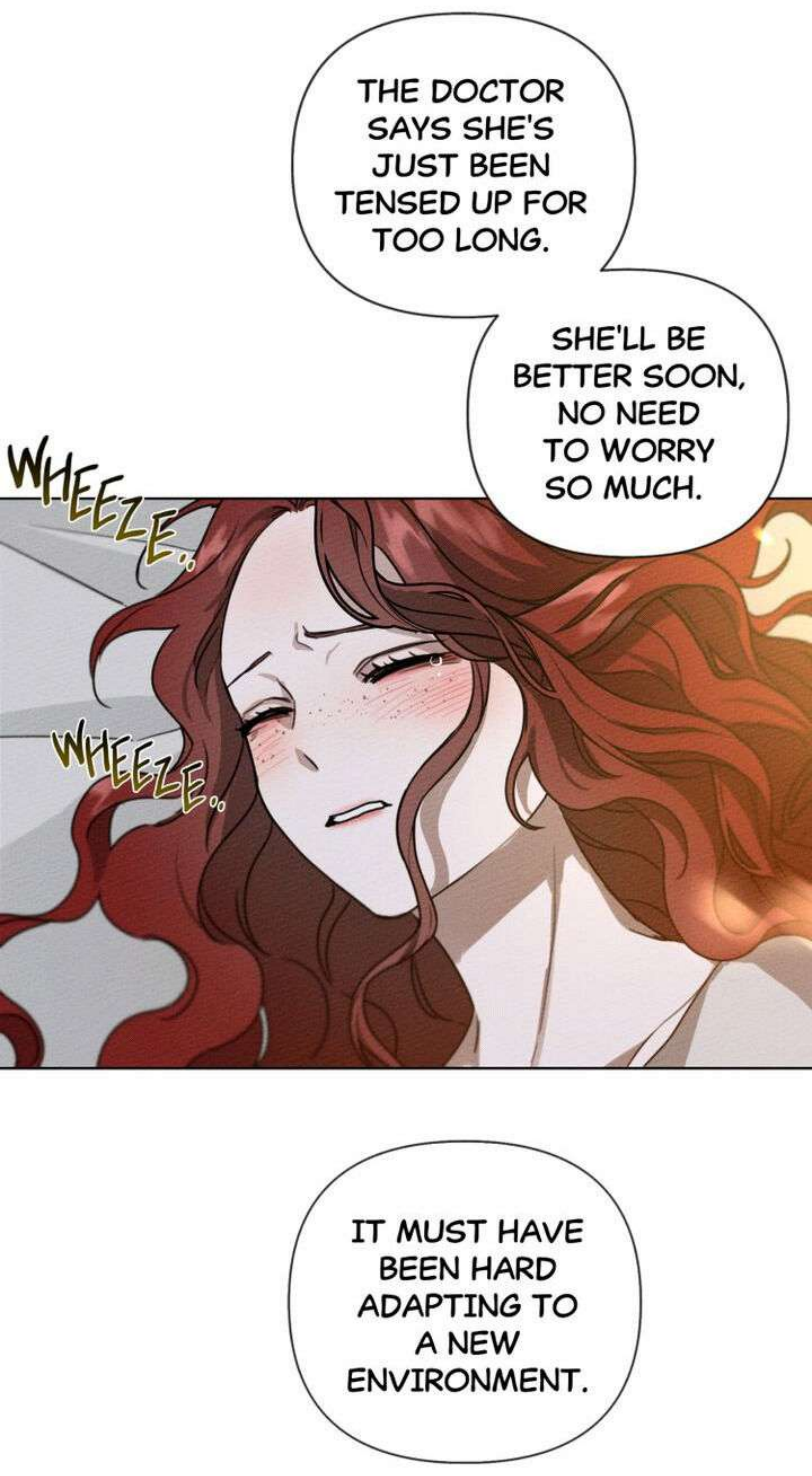


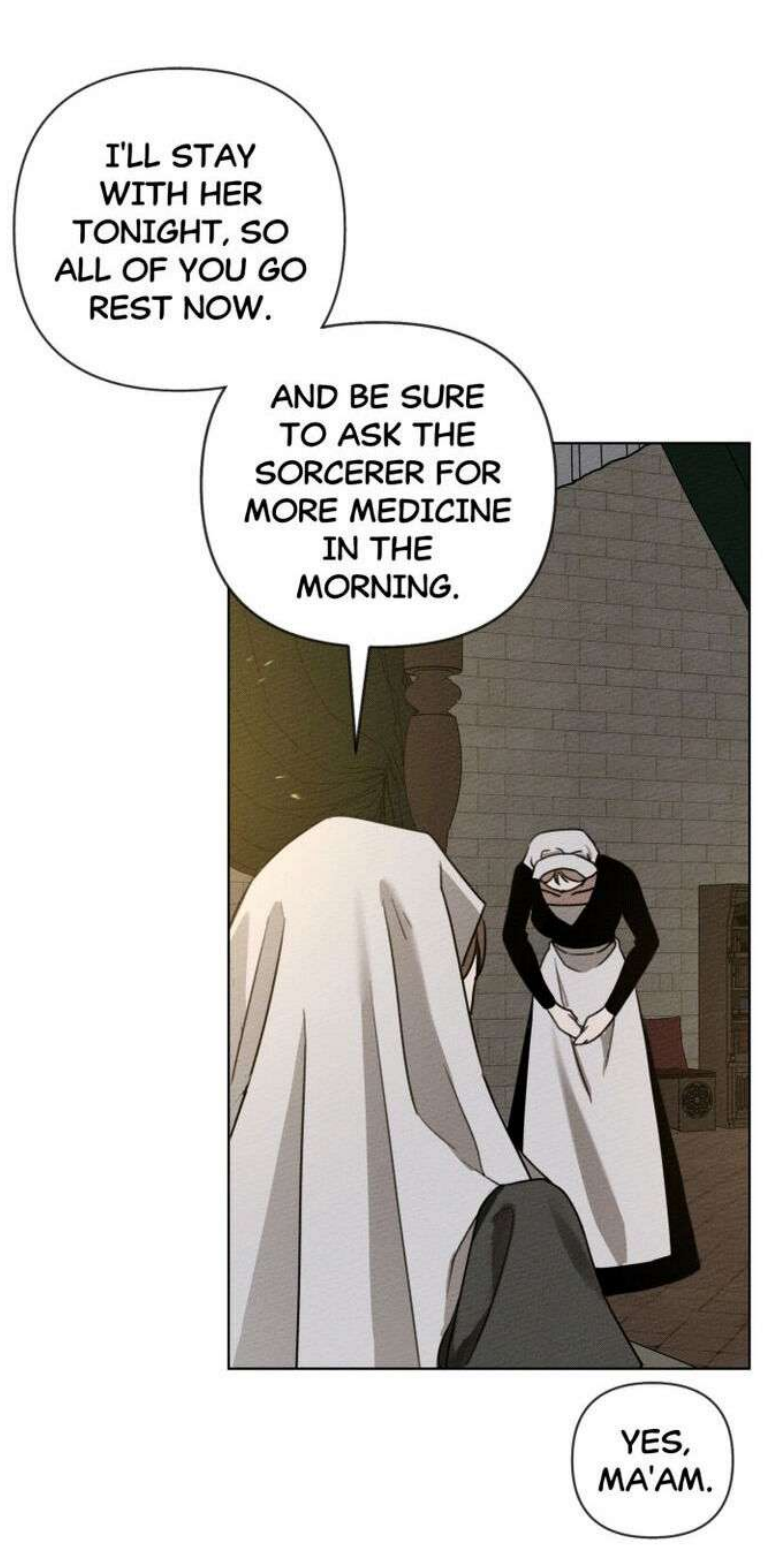
THEN...

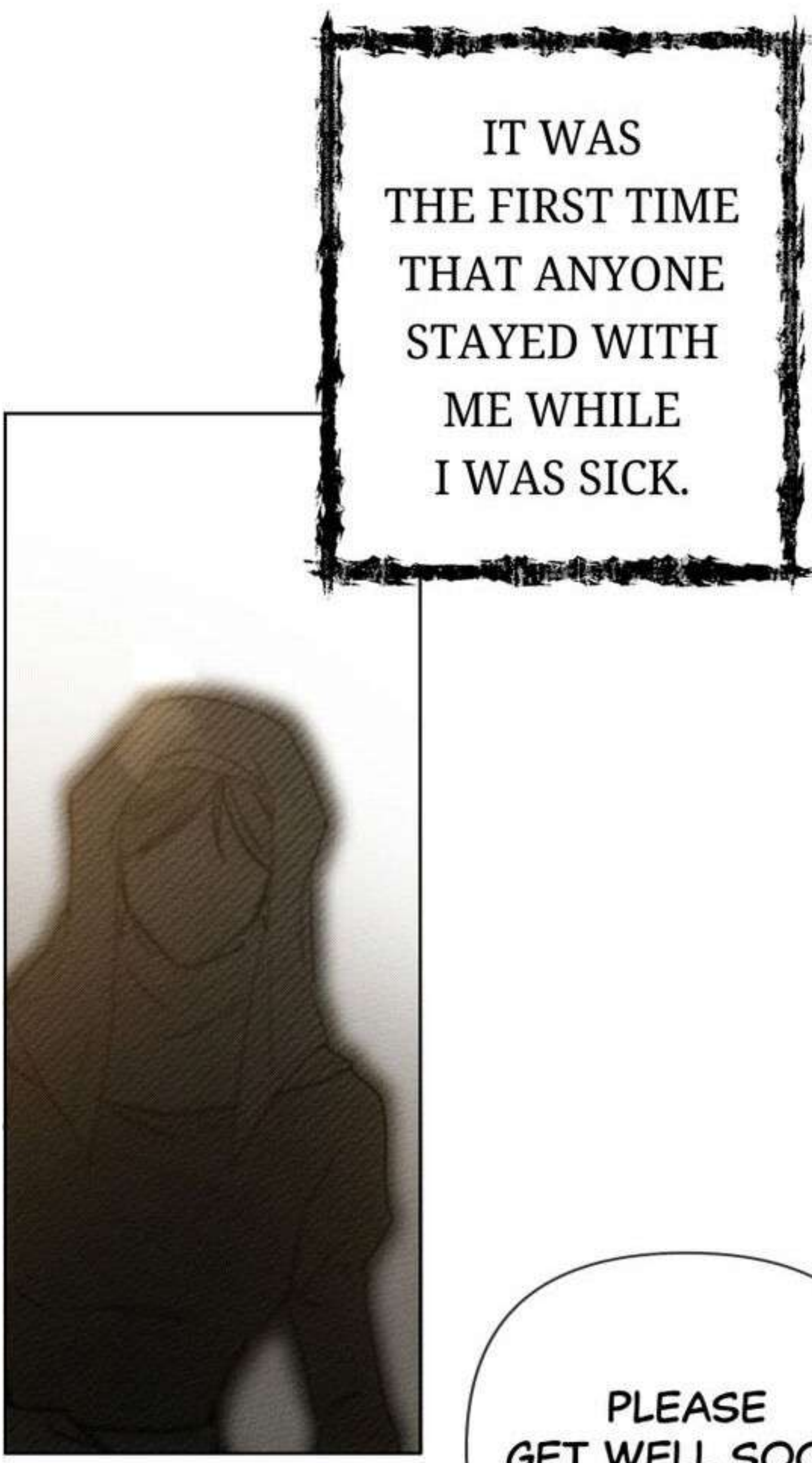
TO BE CAST ASIDE AGAIN
WOULD BE...

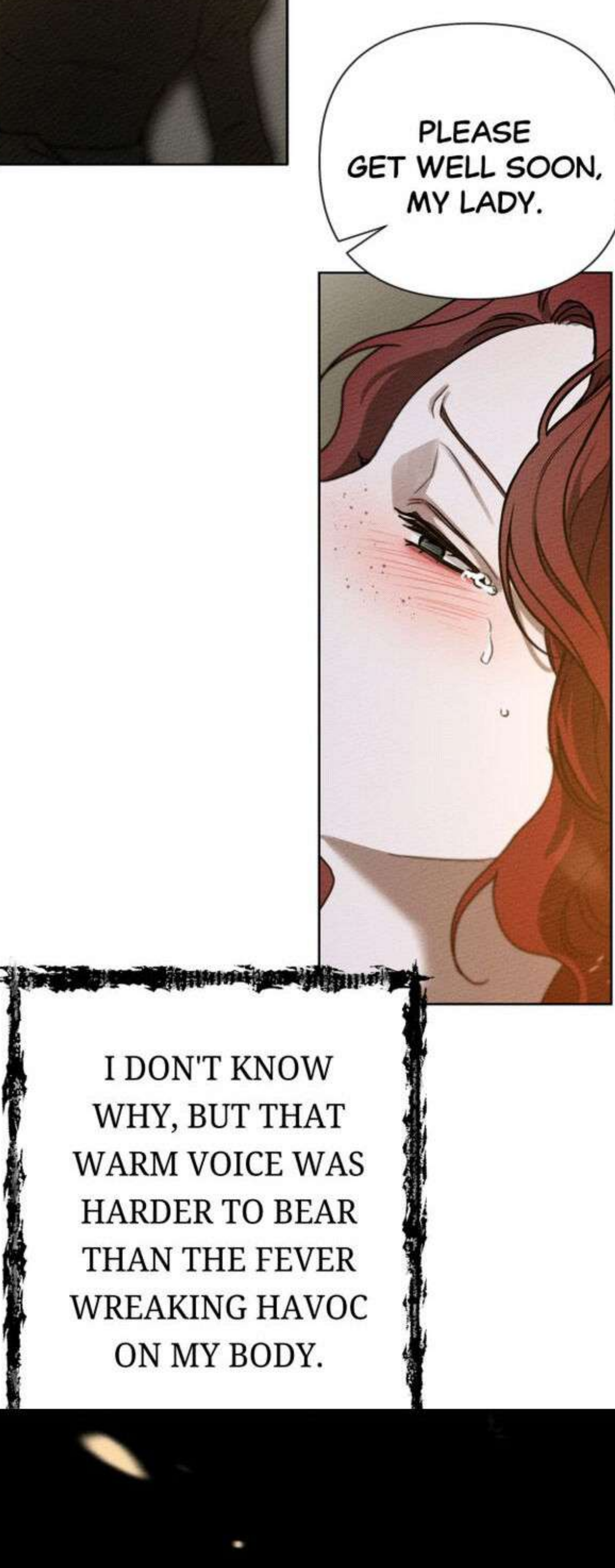

SEIZED BY A FIERCE ANXIETY FROM RIFTAN'S ABSENCE, I BROKE DOWN AND FELL ILL.

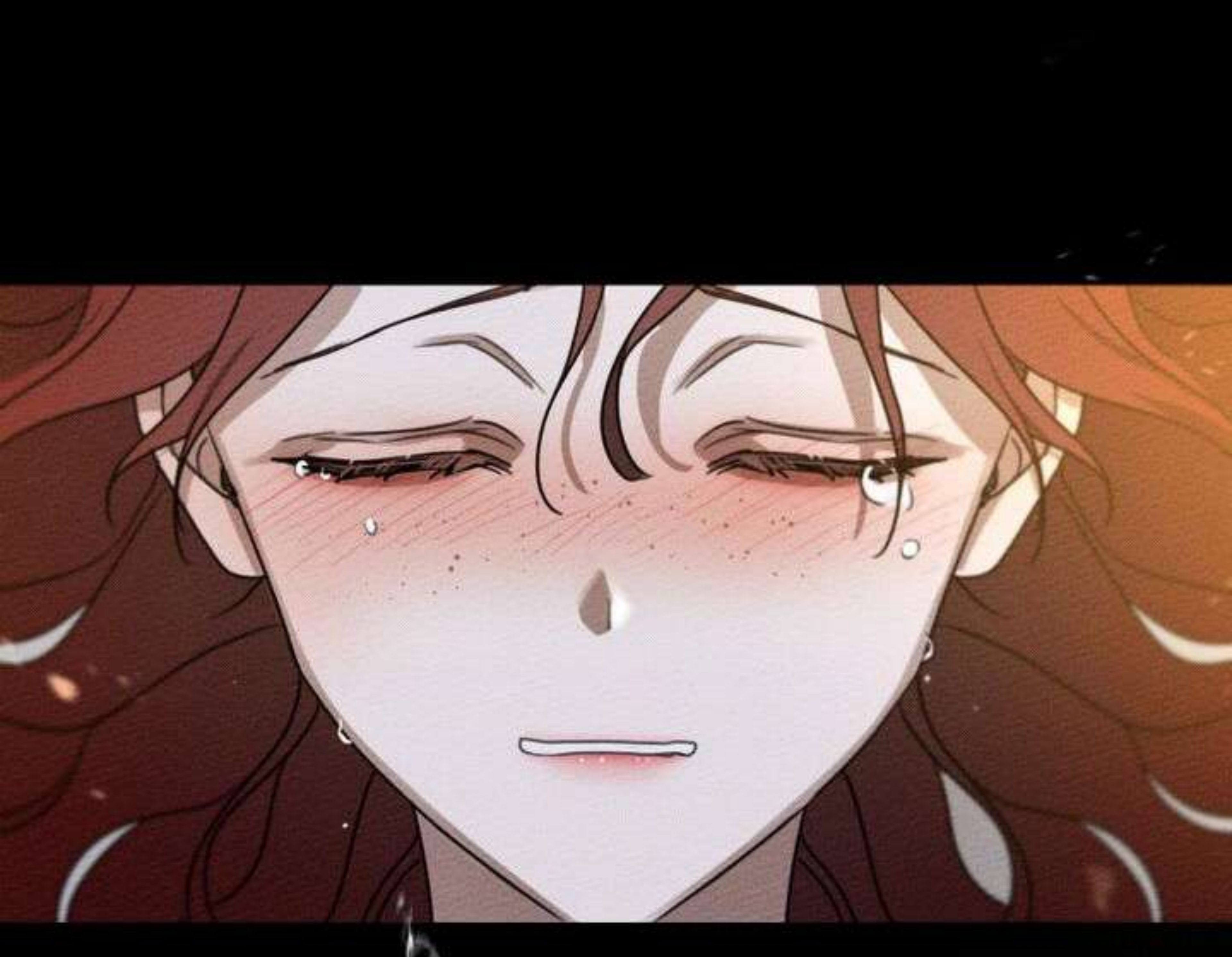


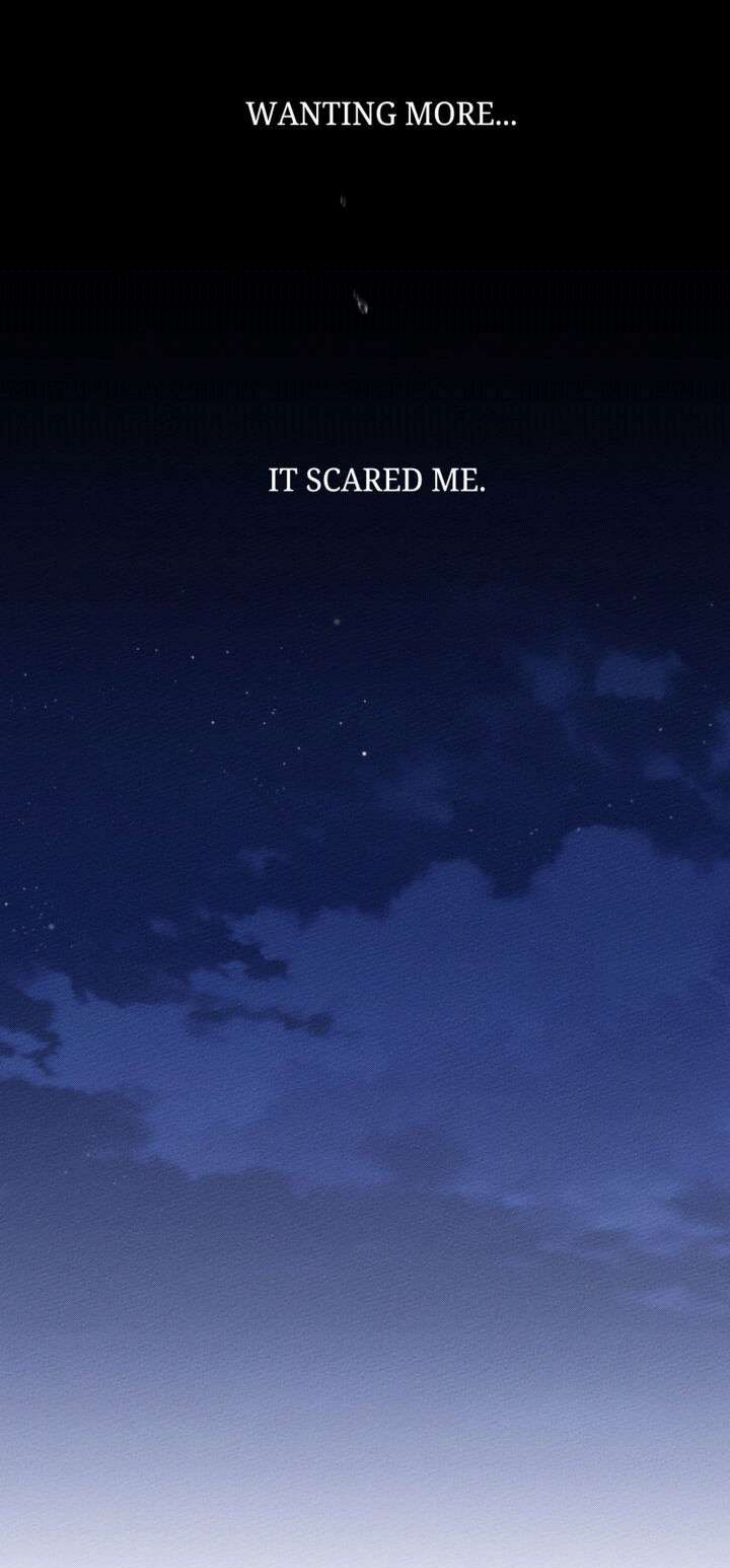

THE DOCTOR SAYS SHE'S JUST BEEN TENSED UP FOR TOO LONG.
SHE'LL BE BETTER SOON, NO NEED TO WORRY SO MUCH.
WHEEZE..
WHEEZE..
IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD ADAPTING TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT.

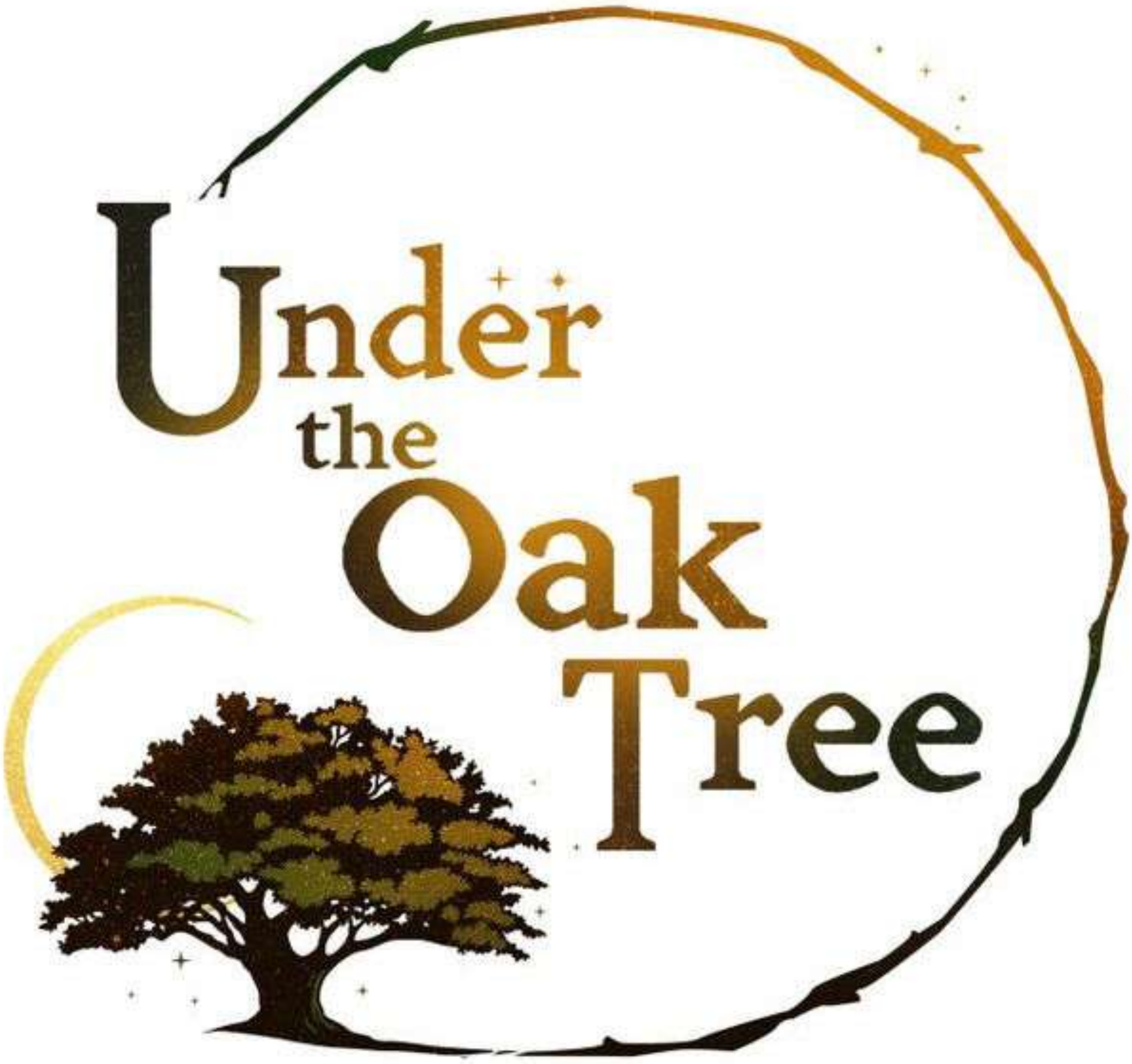

I'LL STAY WITH HER TONIGHT, SO ALL OF YOU GO REST NOW.
AND BE SURE TO ASK THE SORCERER FOR MORE MEDICINE IN THE MORNING.
YES, MA'AM.


IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT ANYONE STAYED WITH ME WHILE I WAS SICK.


PLEASE GET WELL SOON, MY LADY.
I DON'T KNOW WHY, BUT THAT WARM VOICE WAS HARDER TO BEAR THAN THE FEVER WREAKING HAVOC ON MY BODY.


BECAUSE I KEPT


WANTING MORE...
IT SCARED ME.



Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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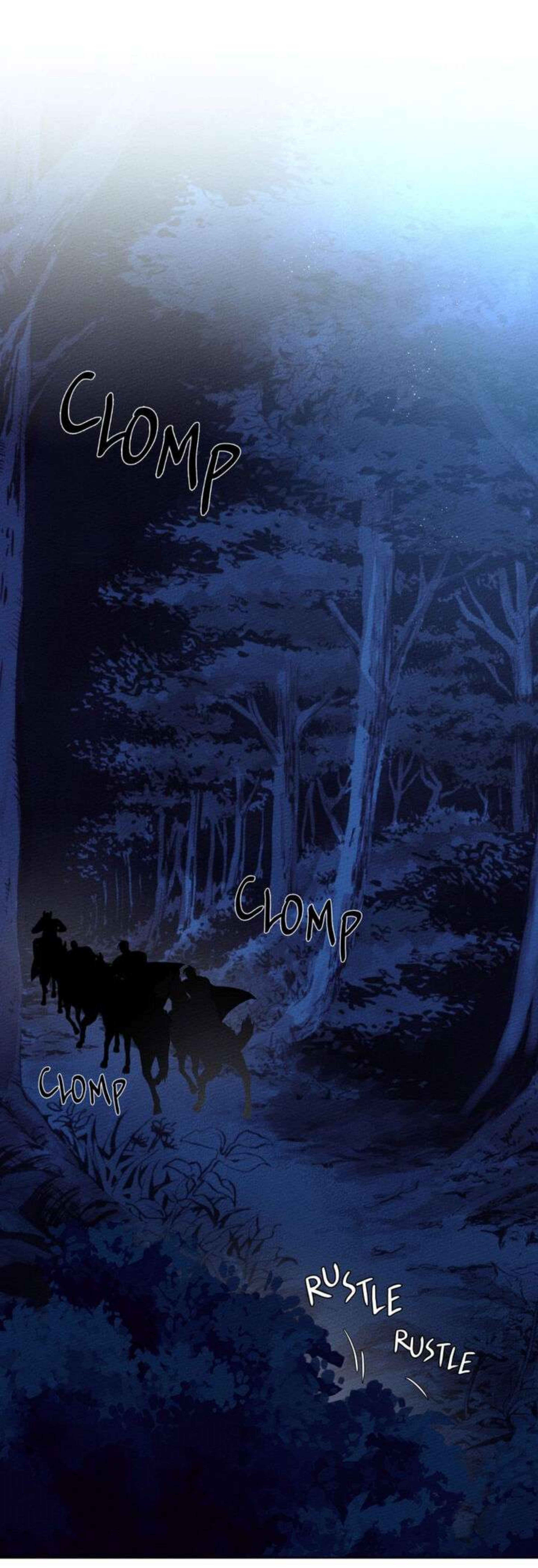
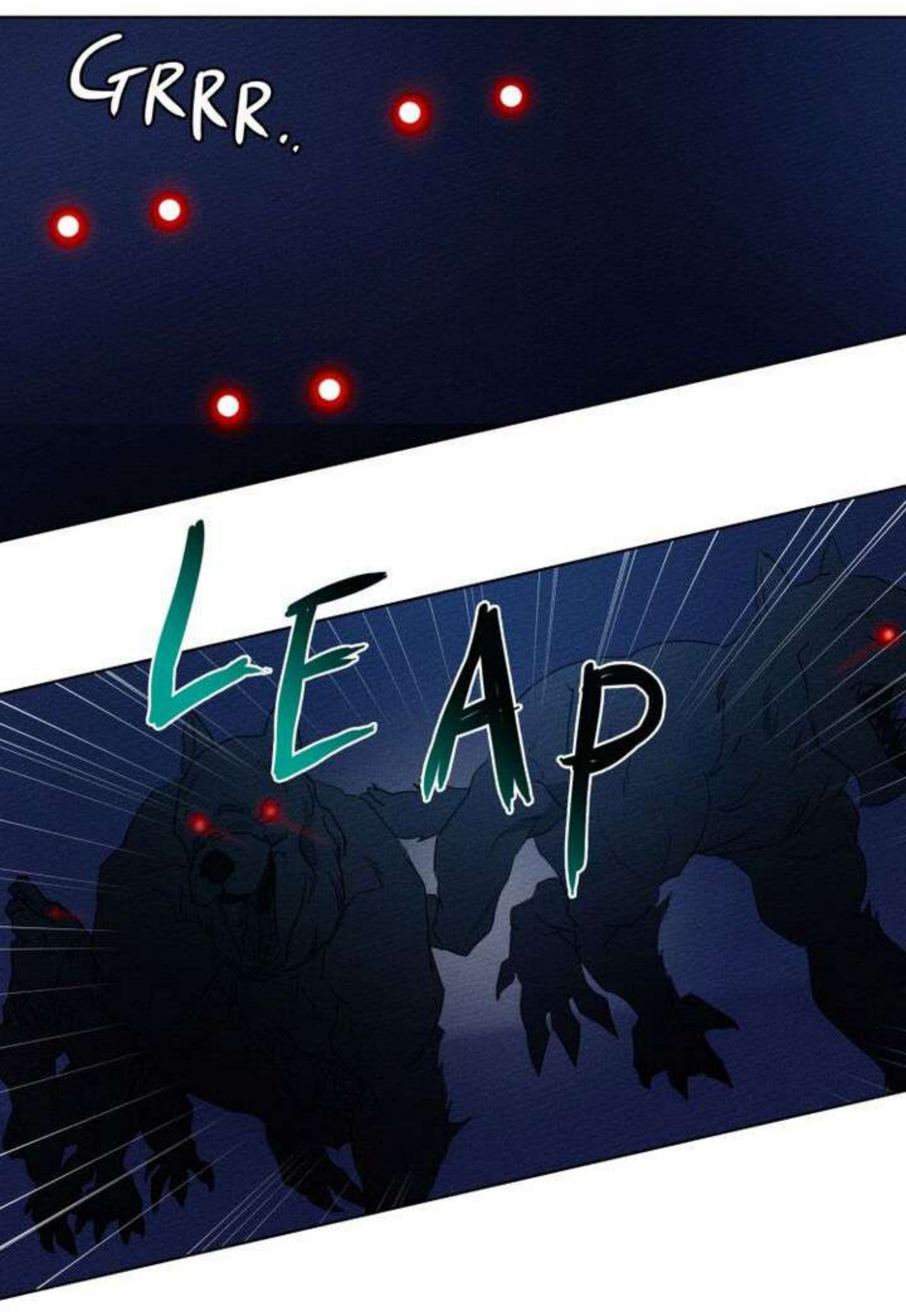
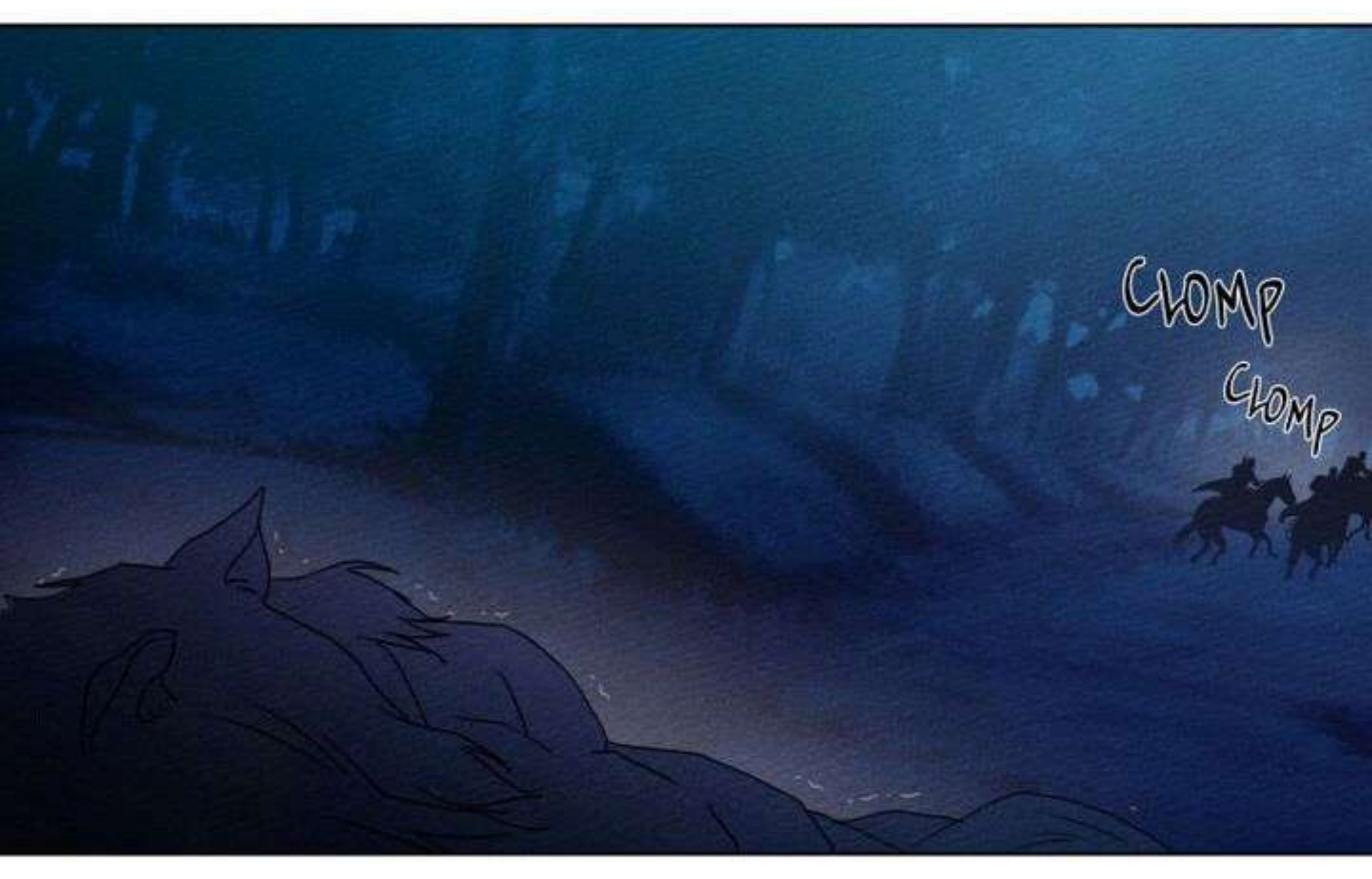
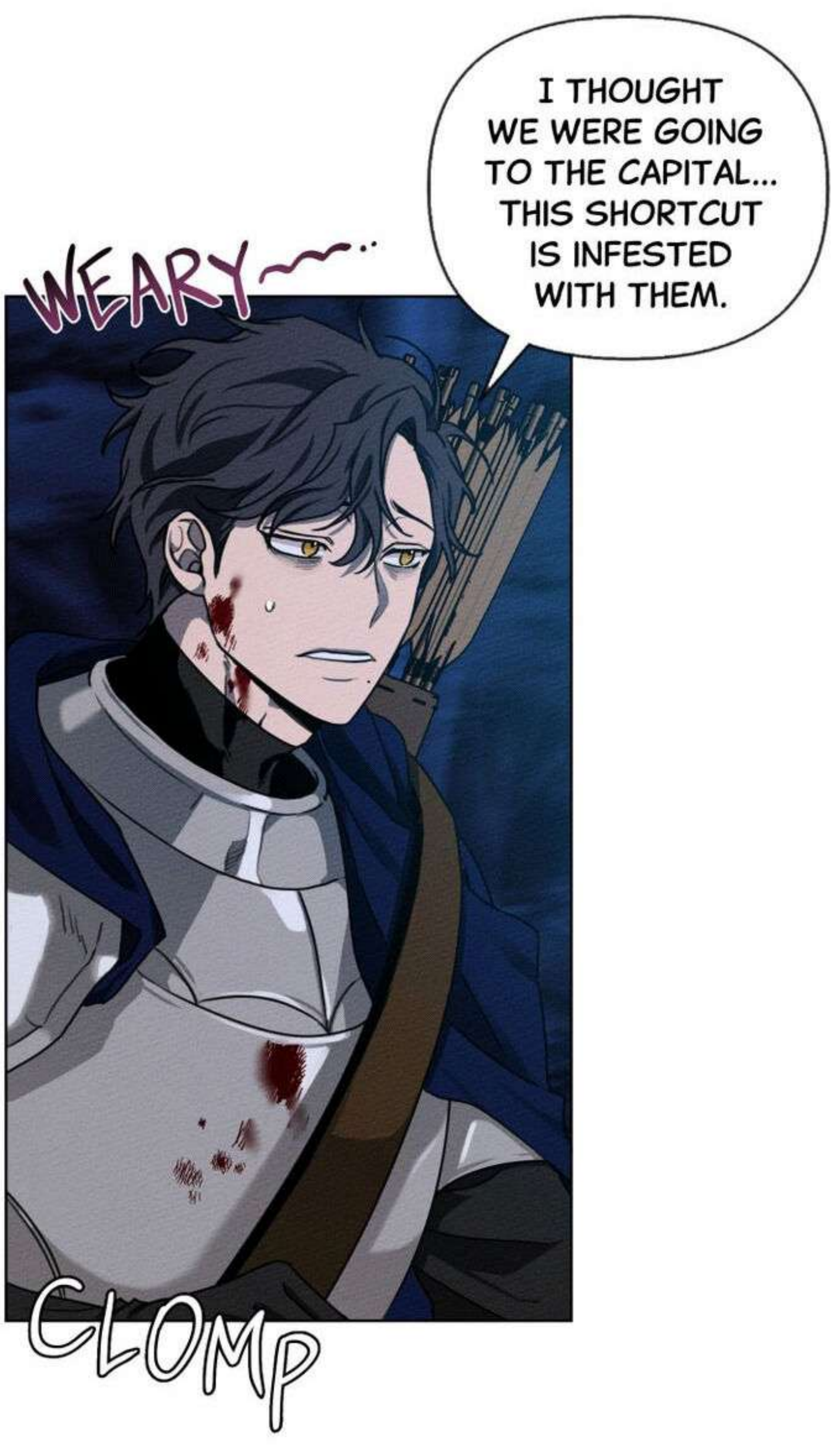

CLOMP
CLOMP
CLOMP
RUSTLE
RUSTLE


GRRR..
LEAP

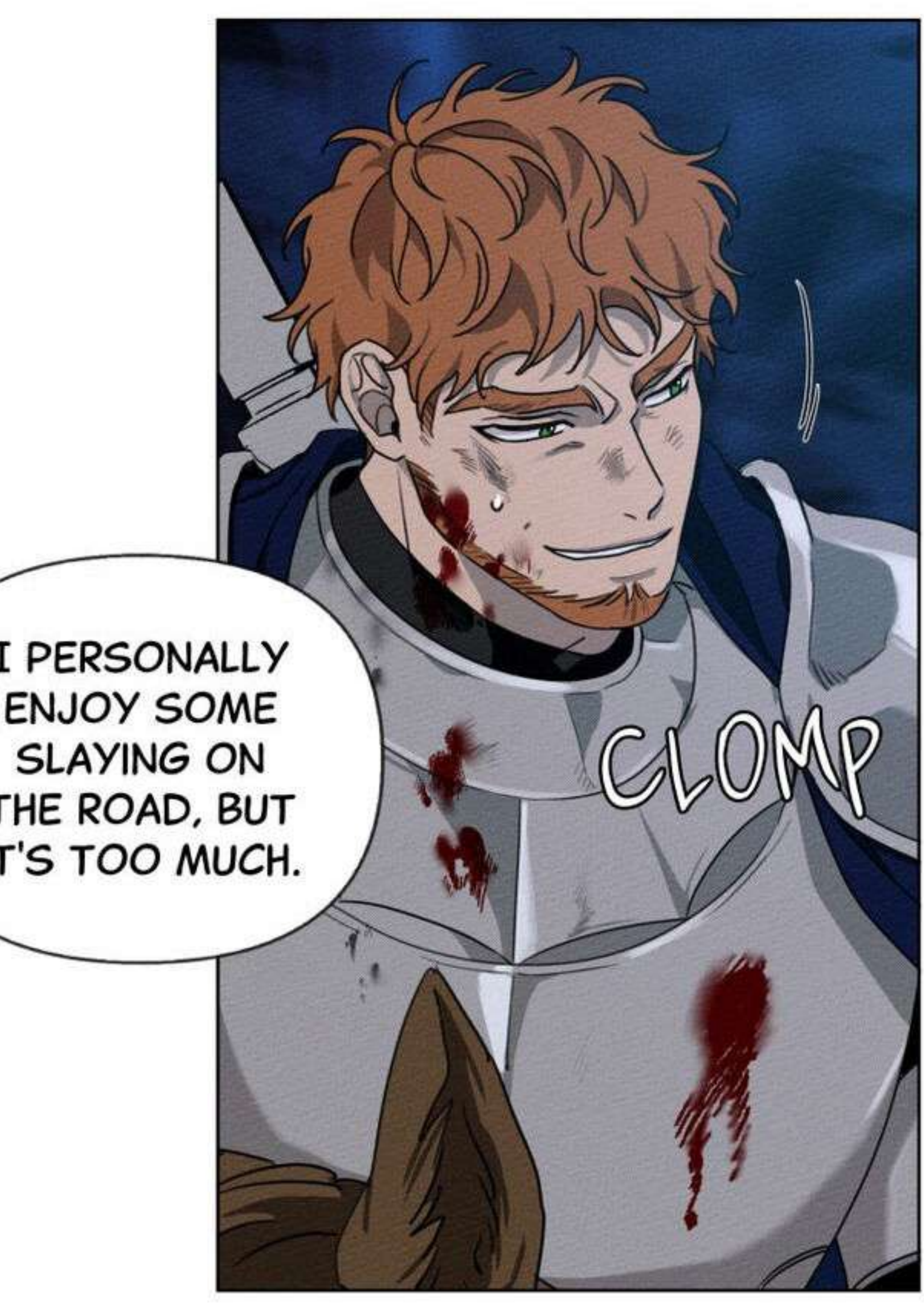
SLASH
HACK
WHIMPER

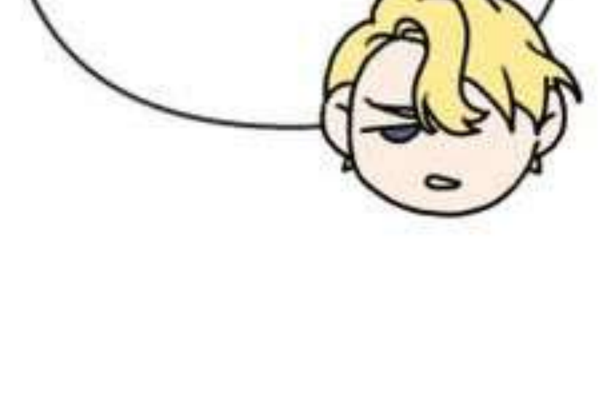

CLOMP
CLOMP

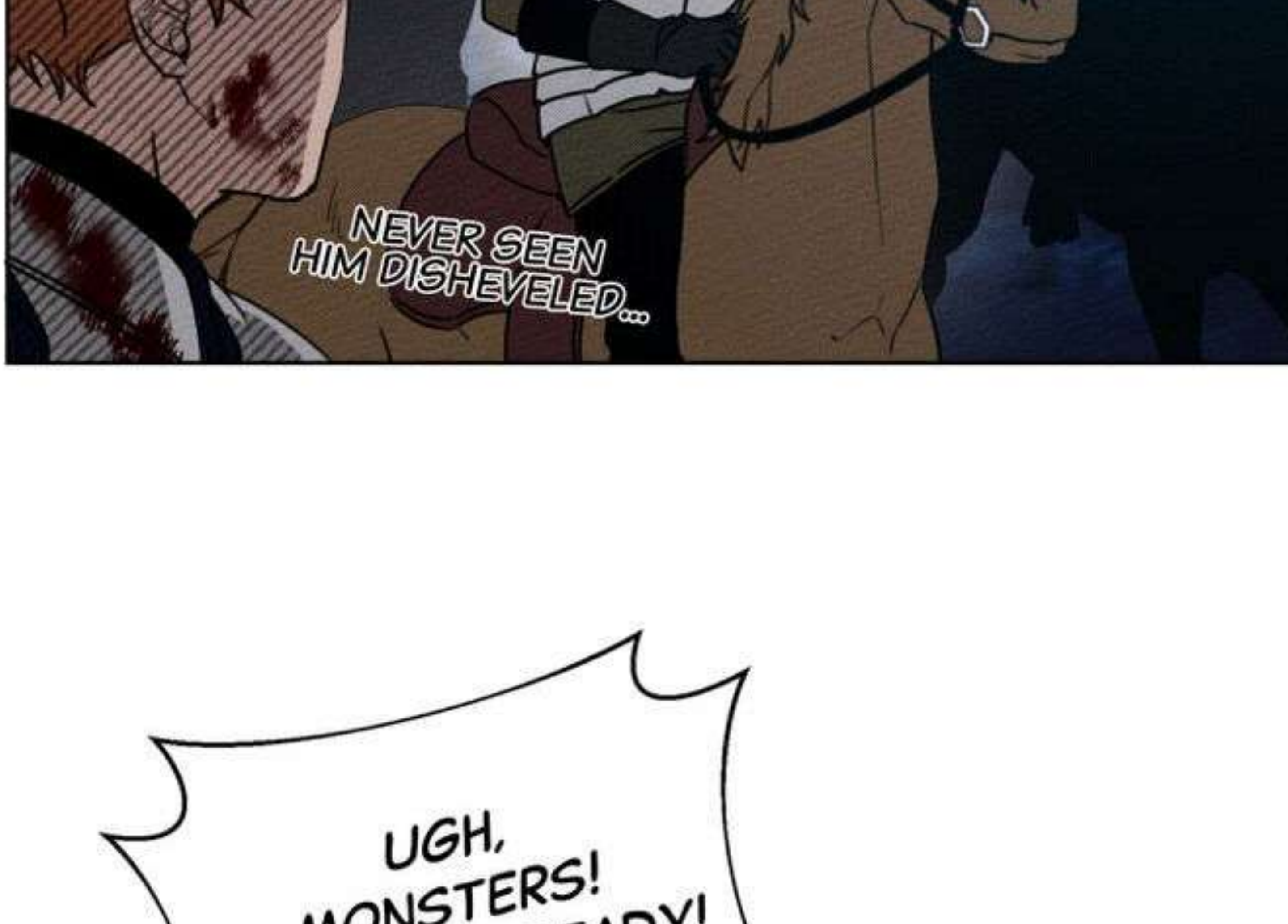
WHY'RE THERE SO MANY MONSTERS?!

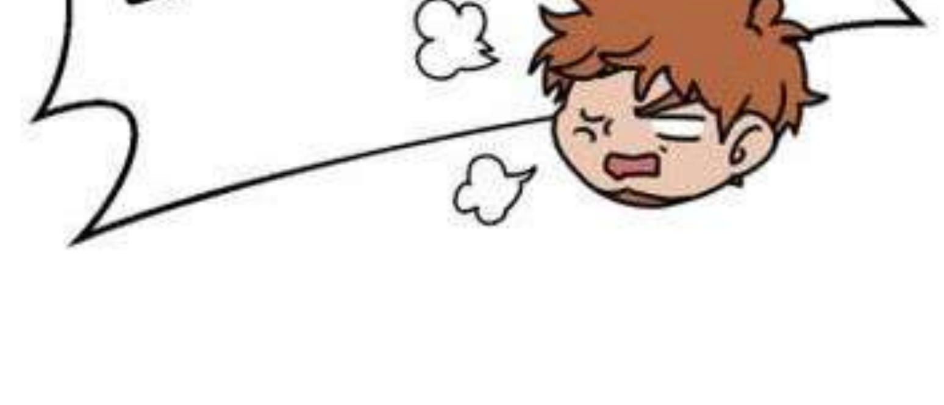

I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO THE CAPITAL... THIS SHORTCUT IS INFESTED WITH THEM.
WEARY~~
CLOMP

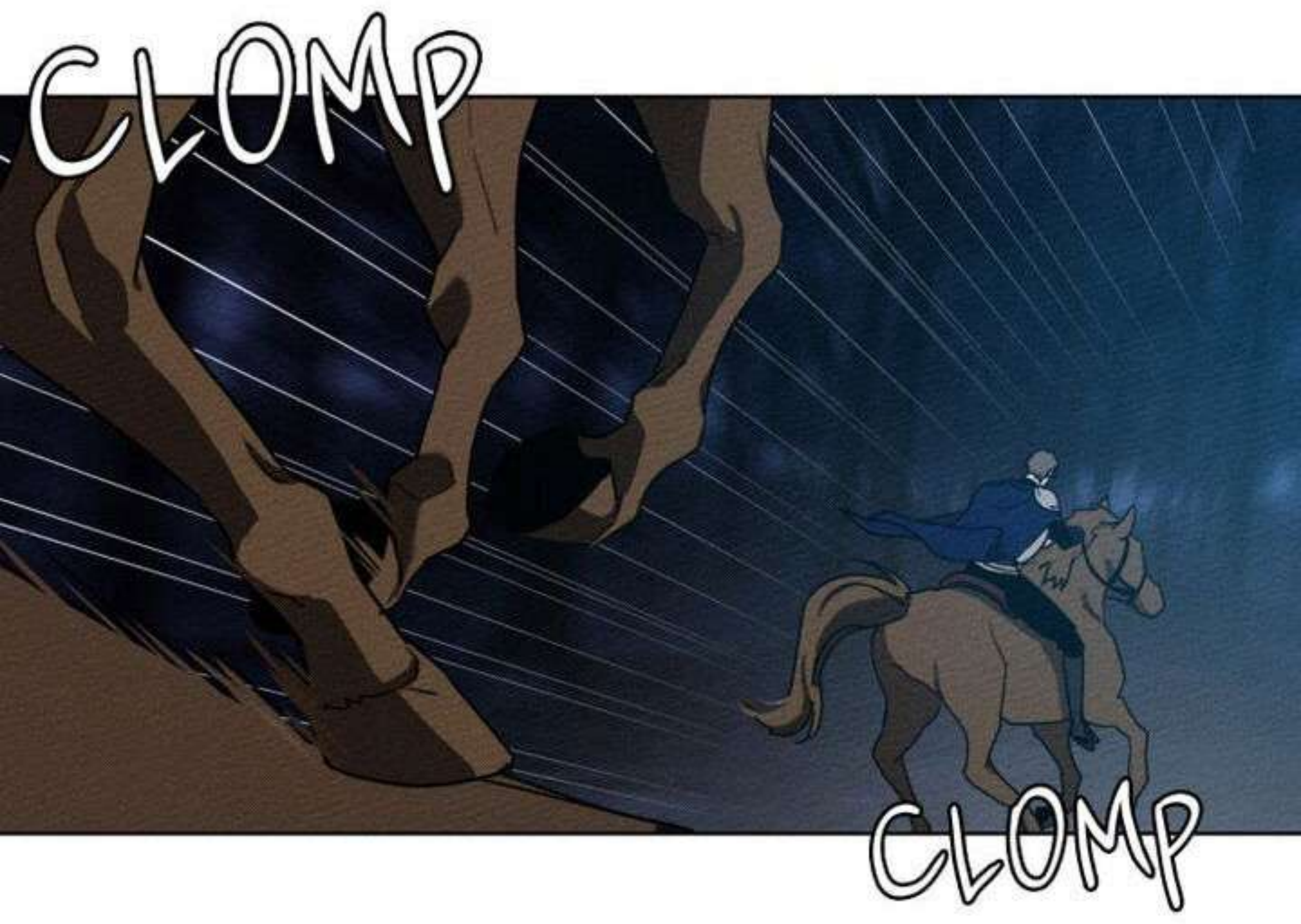
THERE'S A REASON PEOPLE DON'T USE THIS ROUTE.

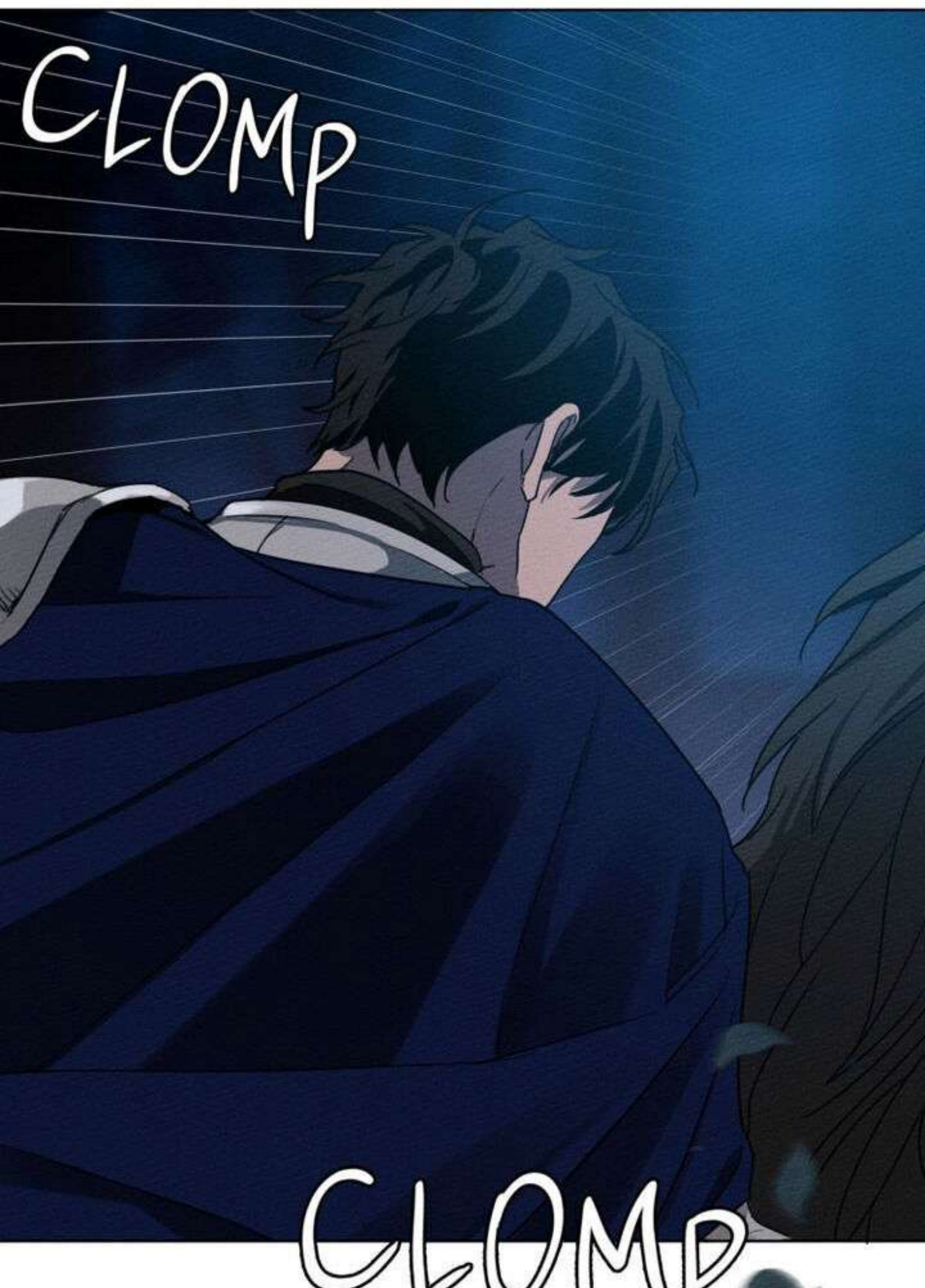

I PERSONALLY ENJOY SOME SLAYING ON THE ROAD, BUT IT'S TOO MUCH.
CLOMP


STOP WHINING.

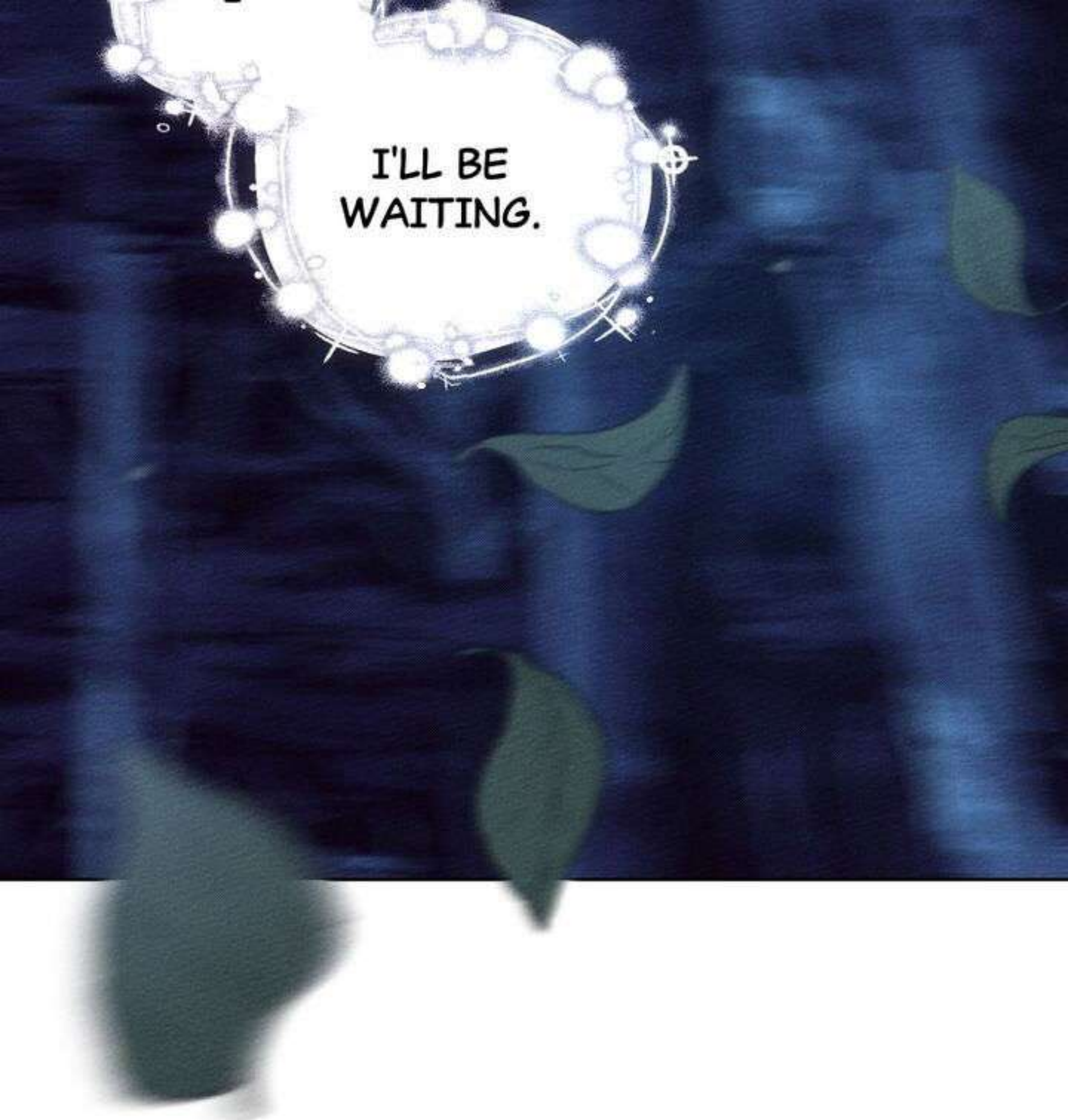

CLEAN
HOW ARE YOU SO PRISTINE?
NEVER SEEN HIM DISHEVELED...

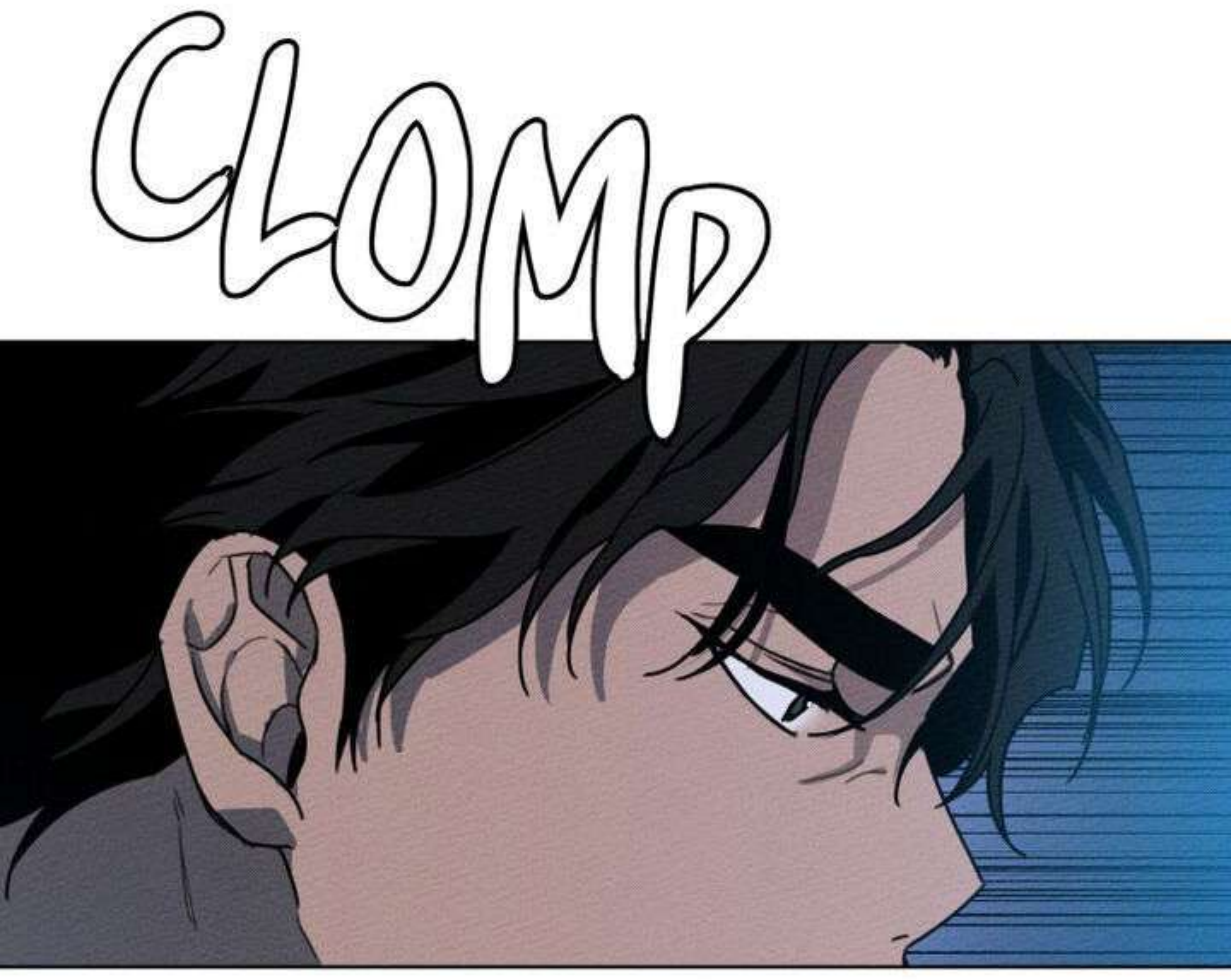

UGH, MONSTERS! ENOUGH ALREADY!

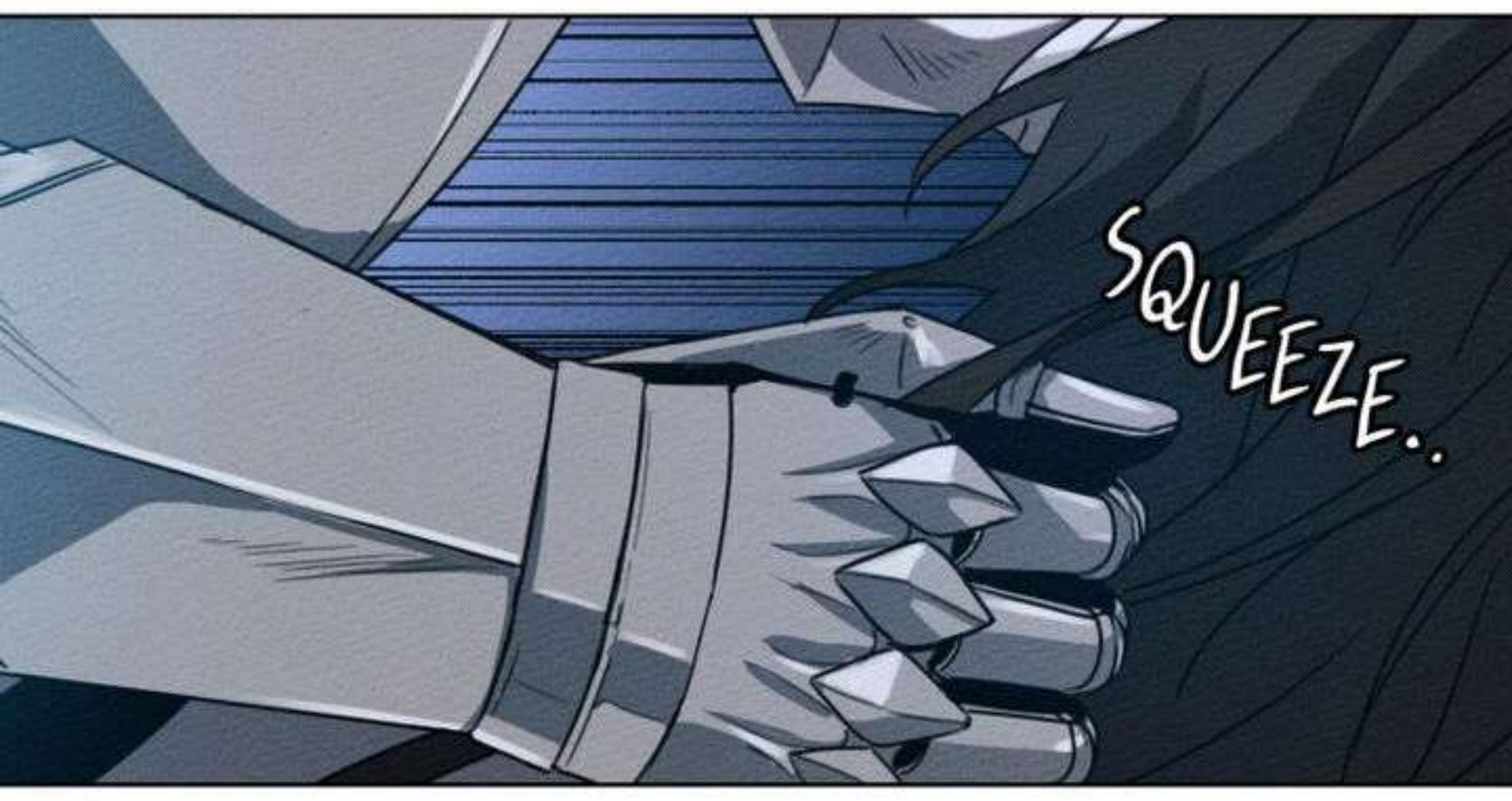

CLOMP
CLOMP

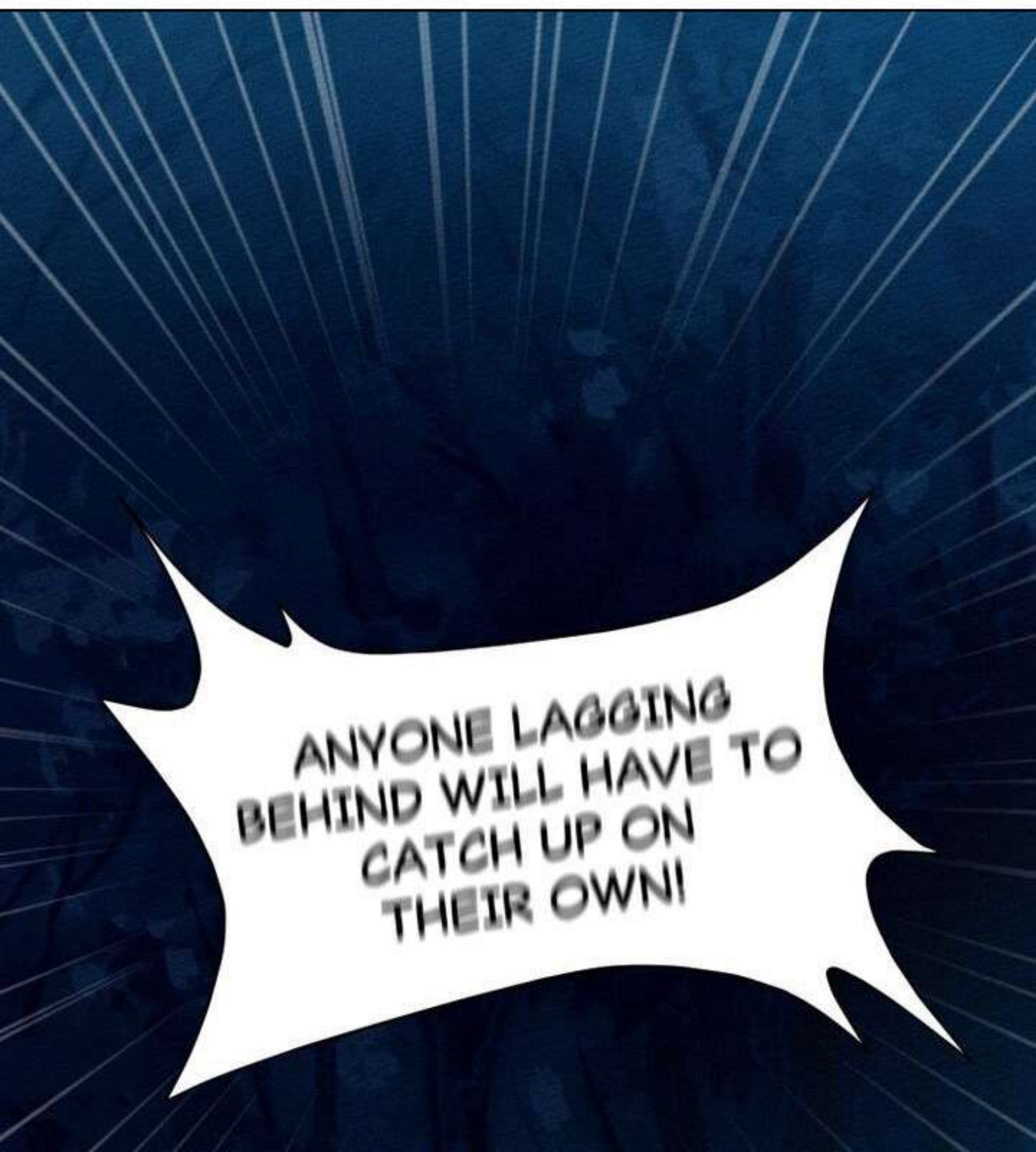

CLOMP
CLOMP

WHOOSH-
I-

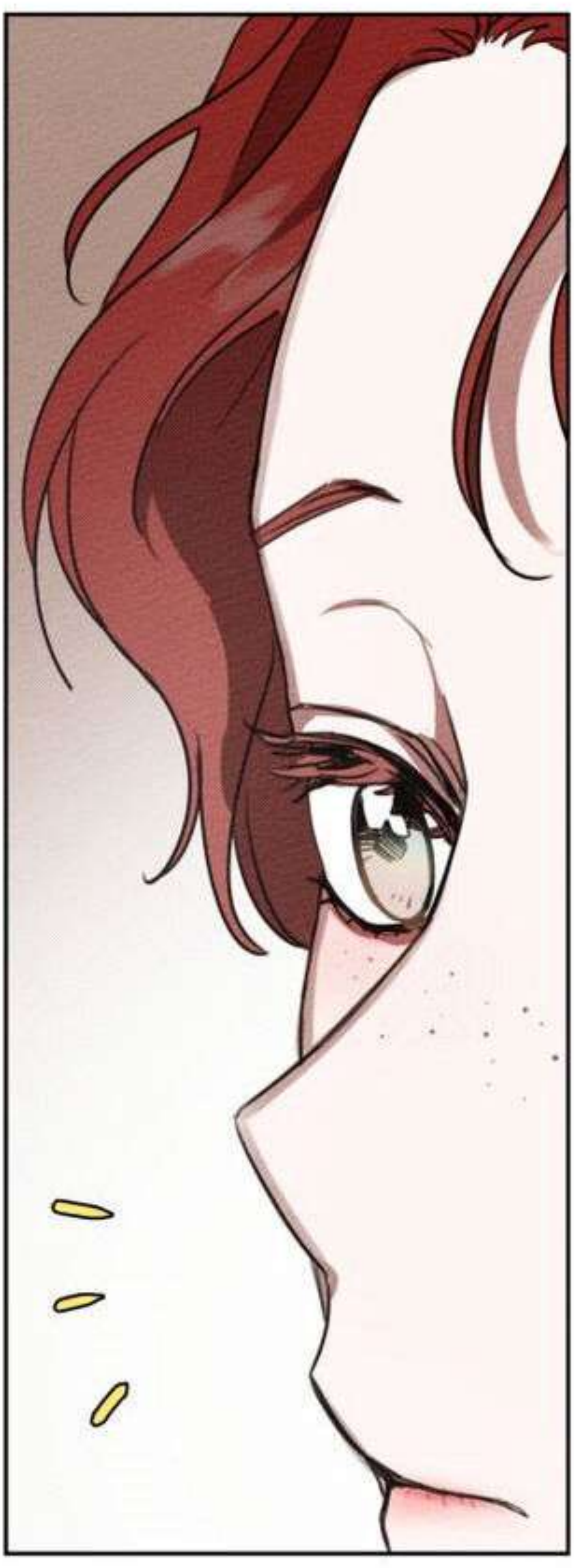

I'LL BE WAITING.

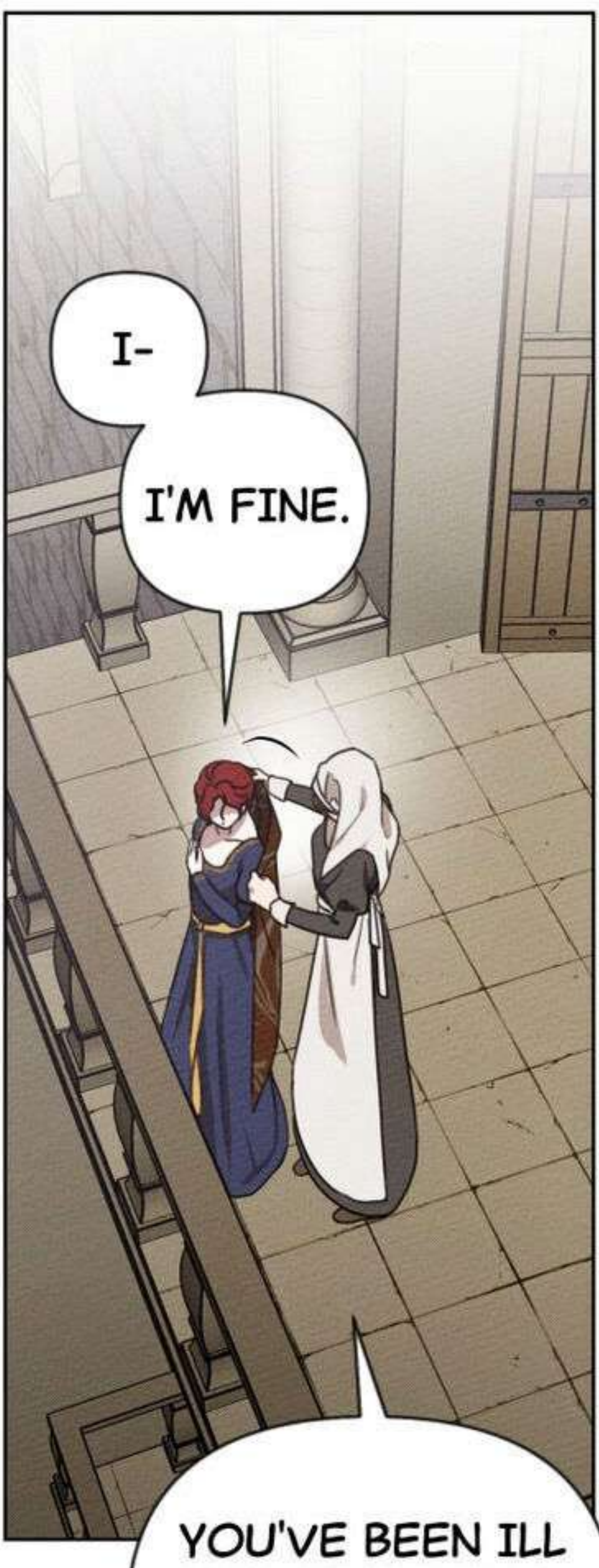

CLOMP


SQUEEZE..


ANYONE LAGGING BEHIND WILL HAVE TO CATCH UP ON THEIR OWN!

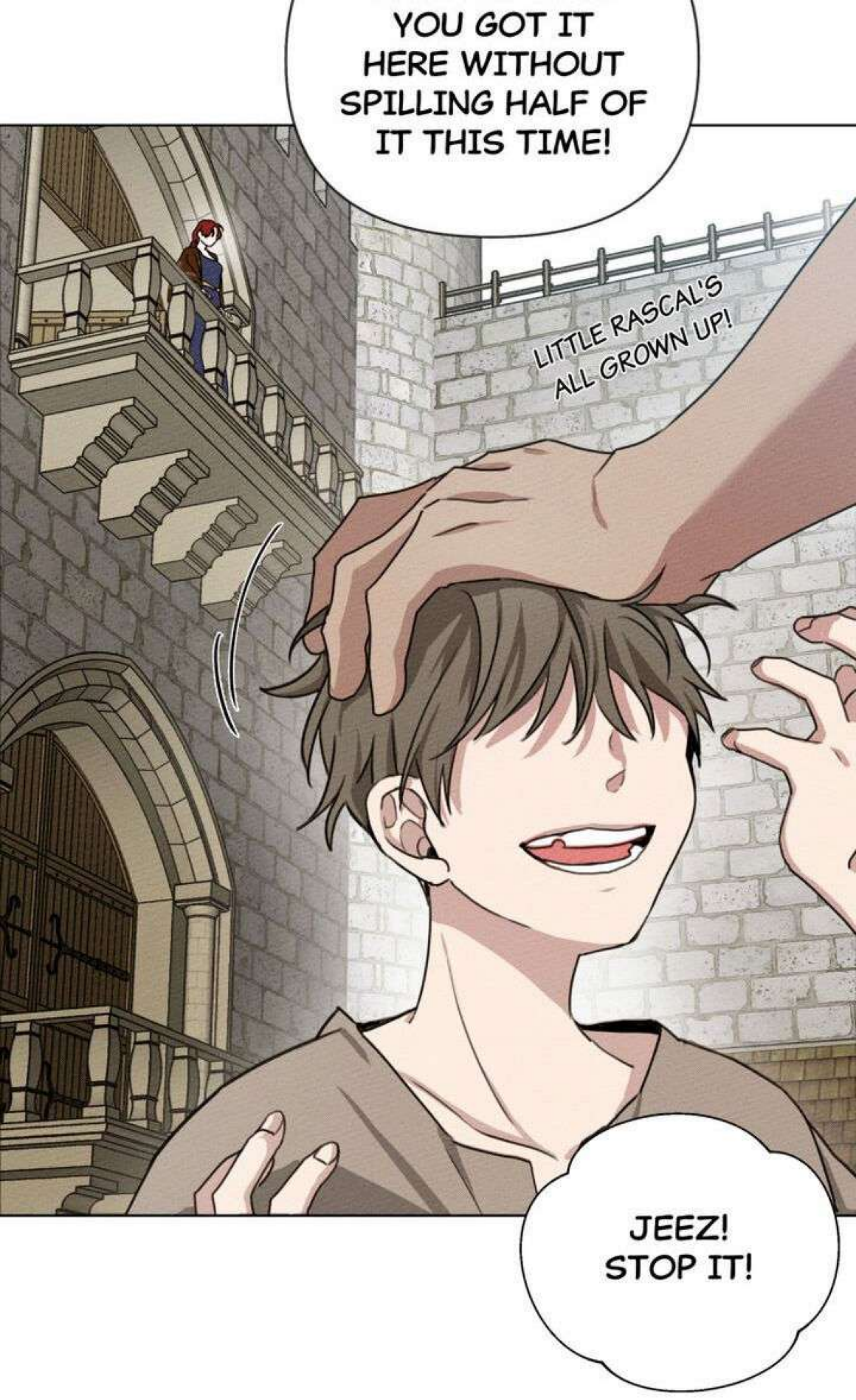
YES, SIR!
GIDDYUP!
CLOMP
COMMANDER!


THE WIND IS COLD, MY LADY.

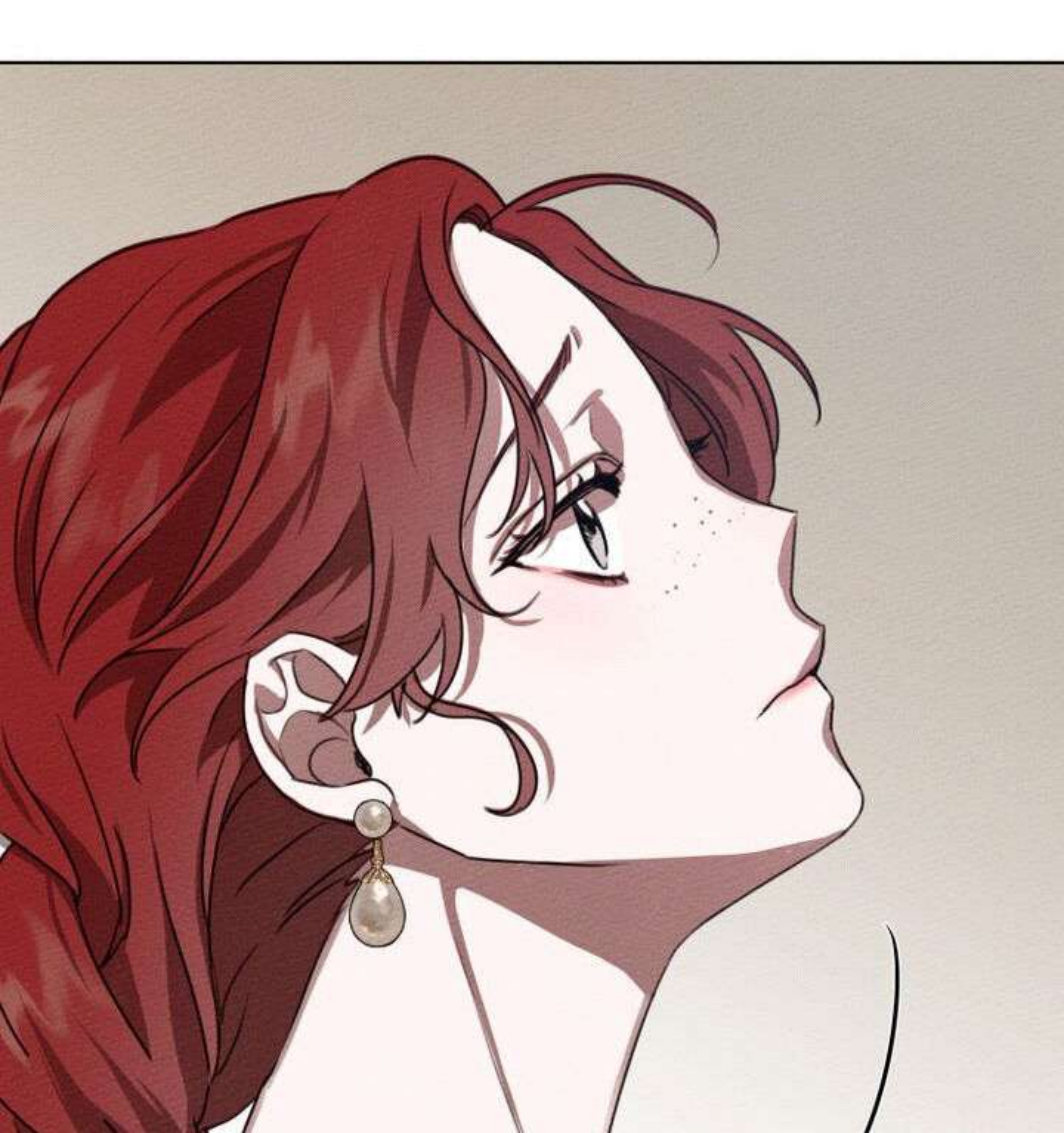

I-
I'M FINE.
YOU'VE BEEN ILL FOR TWO DAYS. YOU SHOULDN'T PUSH YOURSELF...

EVEN THAT
YOUNG CHILD WORKS...

LOOK AT YOU!

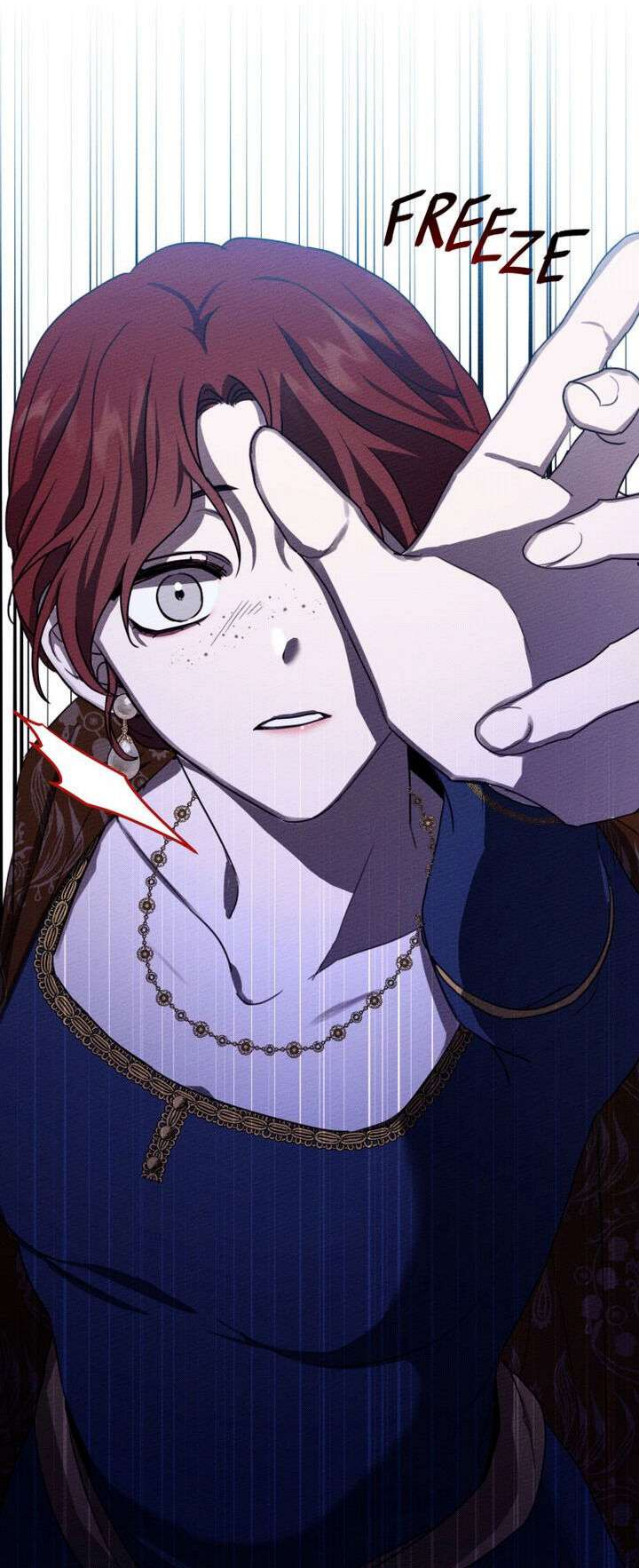

YOU GOT IT HERE WITHOUT SPILLING HALF OF IT THIS TIME!
LITTLE RASCAL'S ALL GROWN UP!
JEEZ! STOP IT!

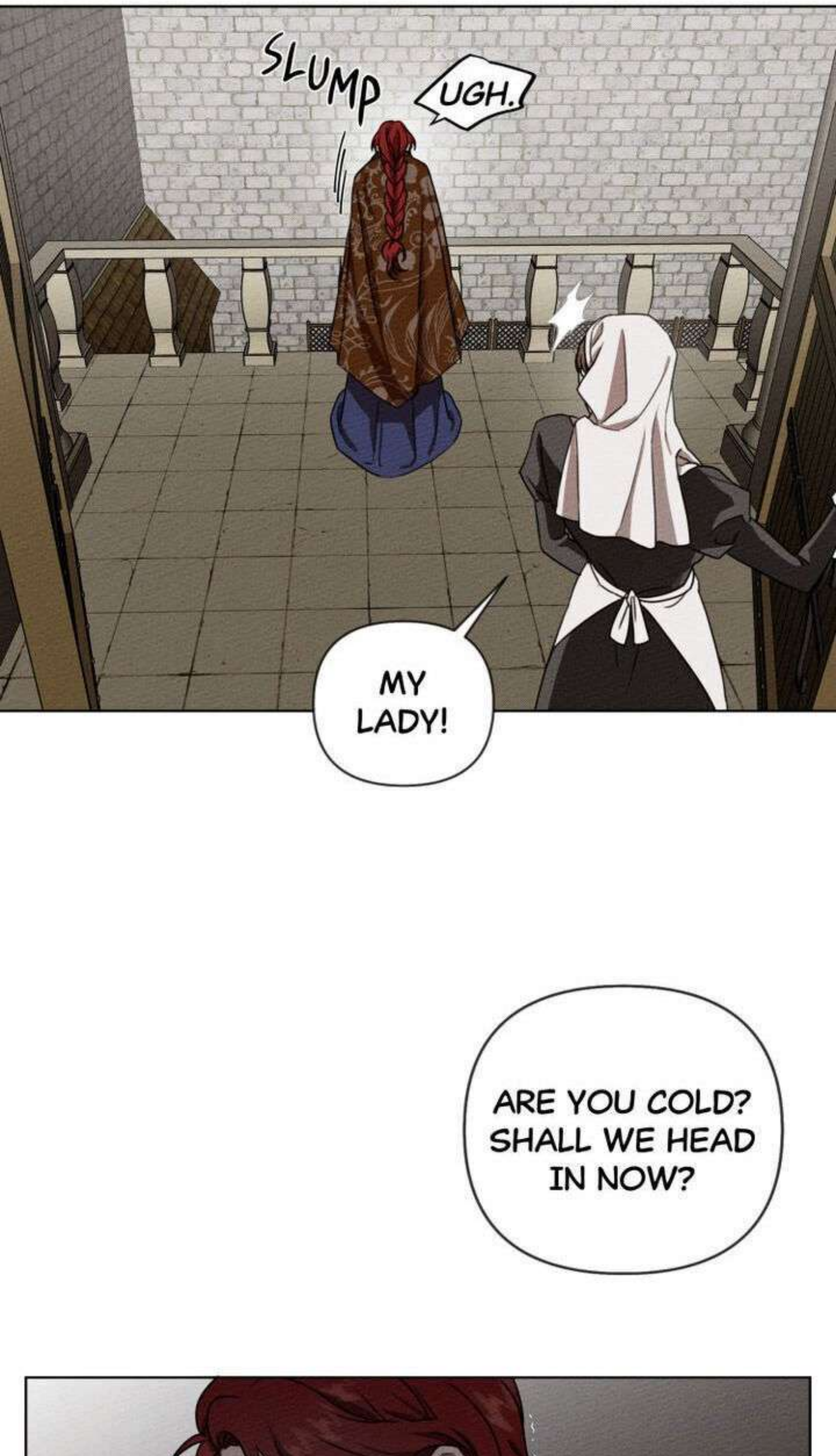
AND FINDS
HAPPINESS IN DOING SO.

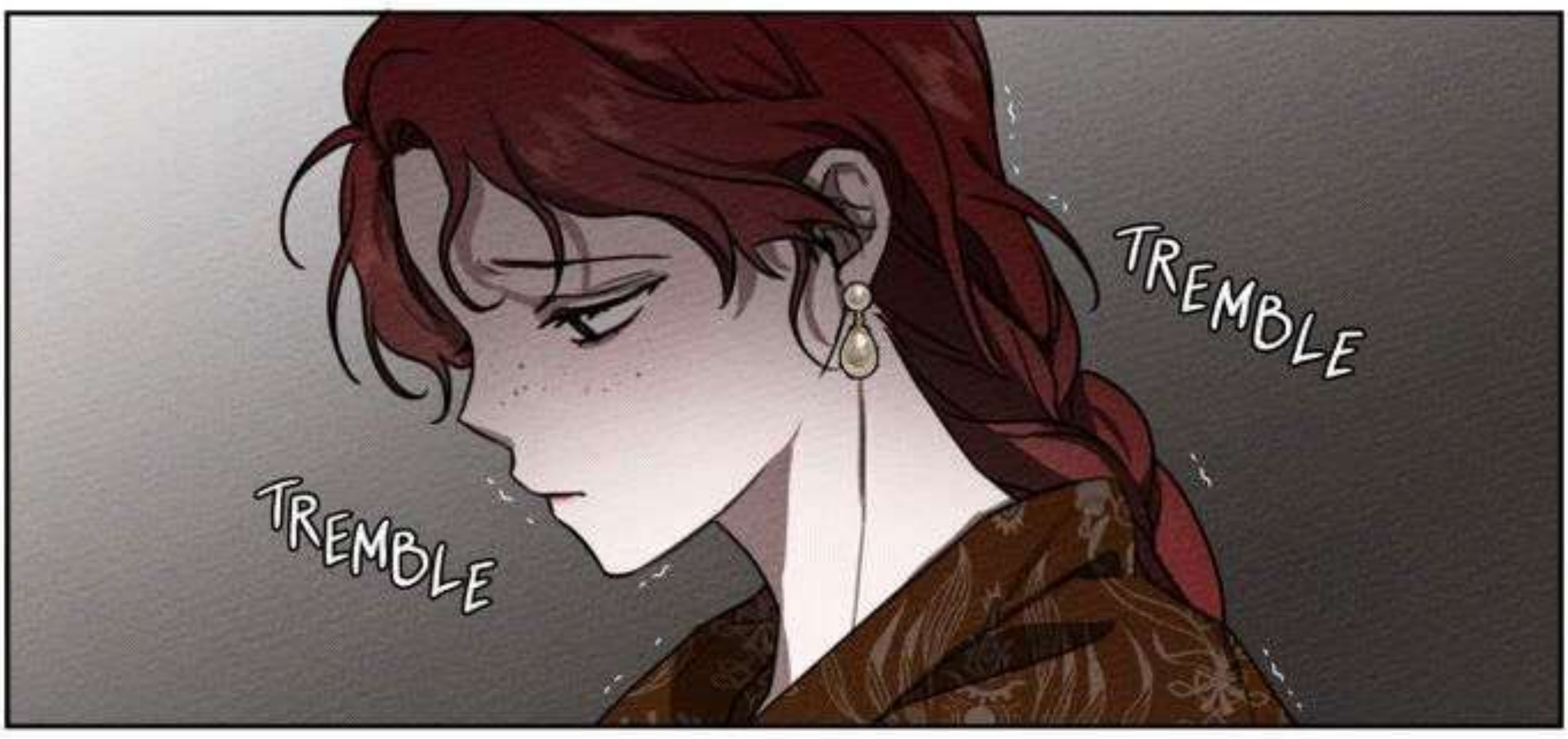


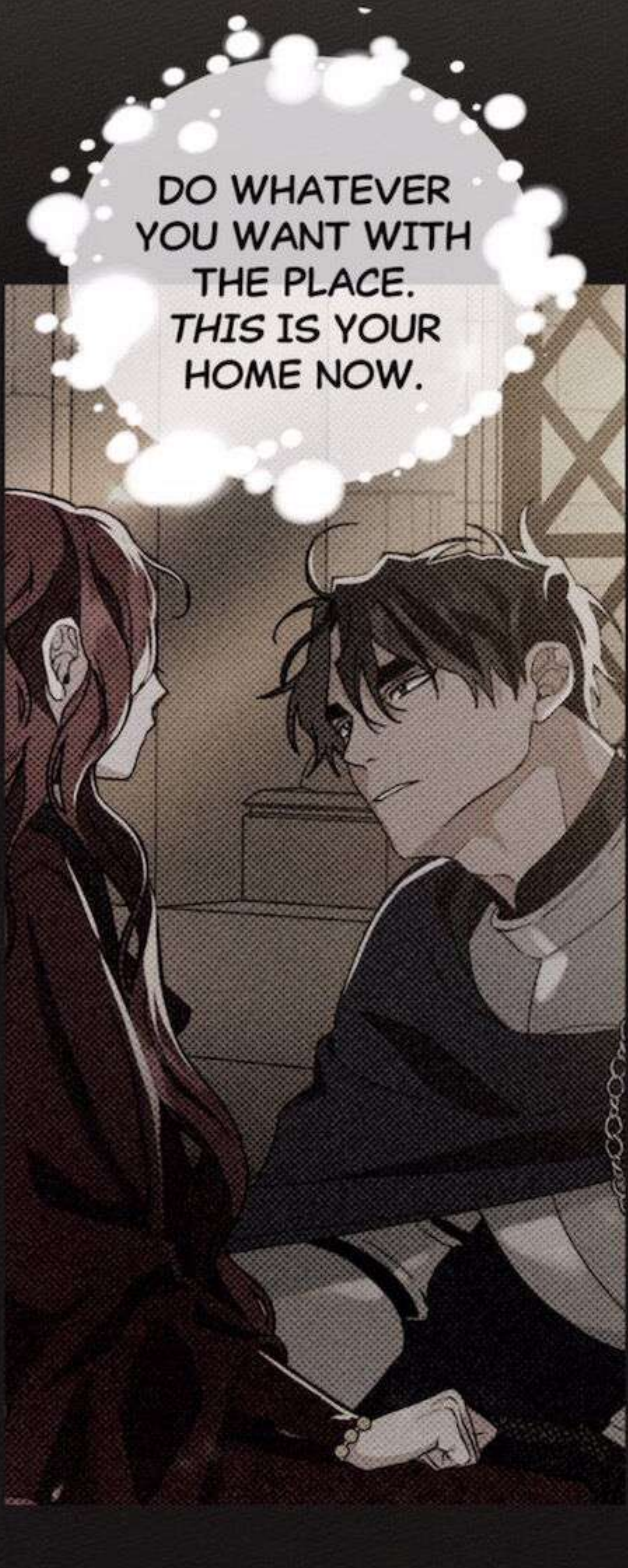
WILL I EVER SMILE LIKE THAT?

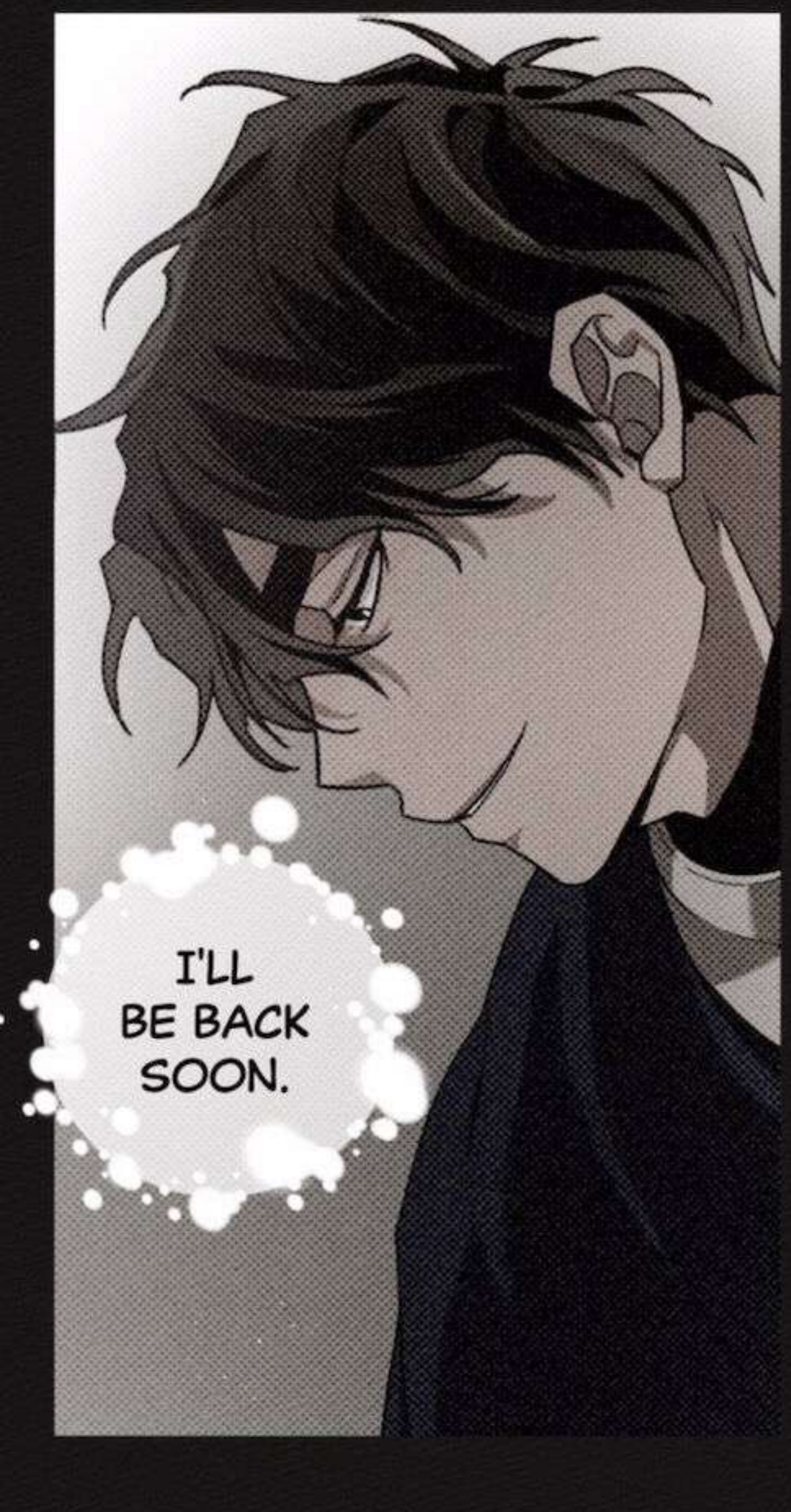
IF YOU AREN'T A BOY, AT LEAST BE HEALTHY! OR DIE! JUST LIKE YOUR MOTH—

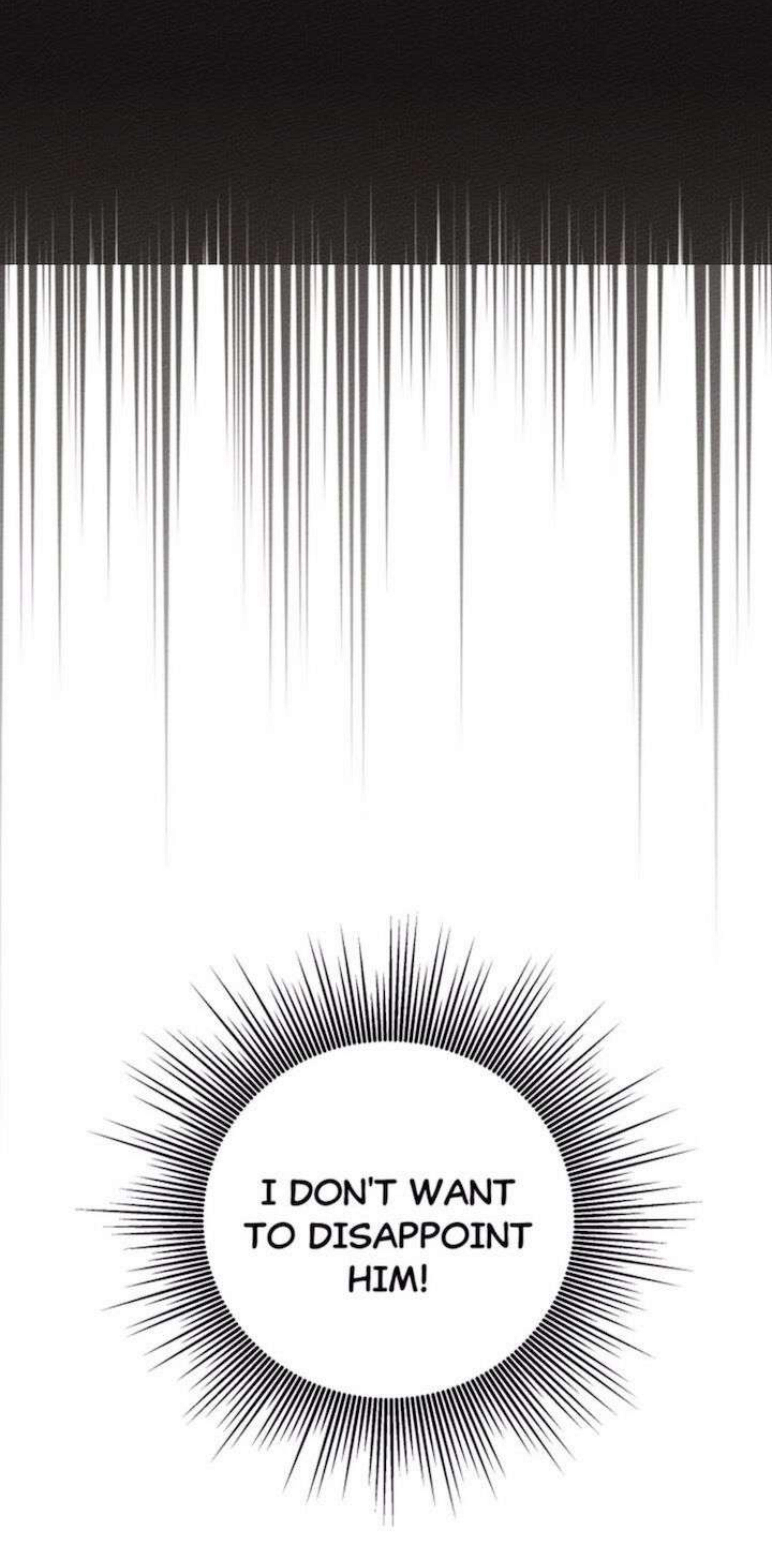

FREEZE

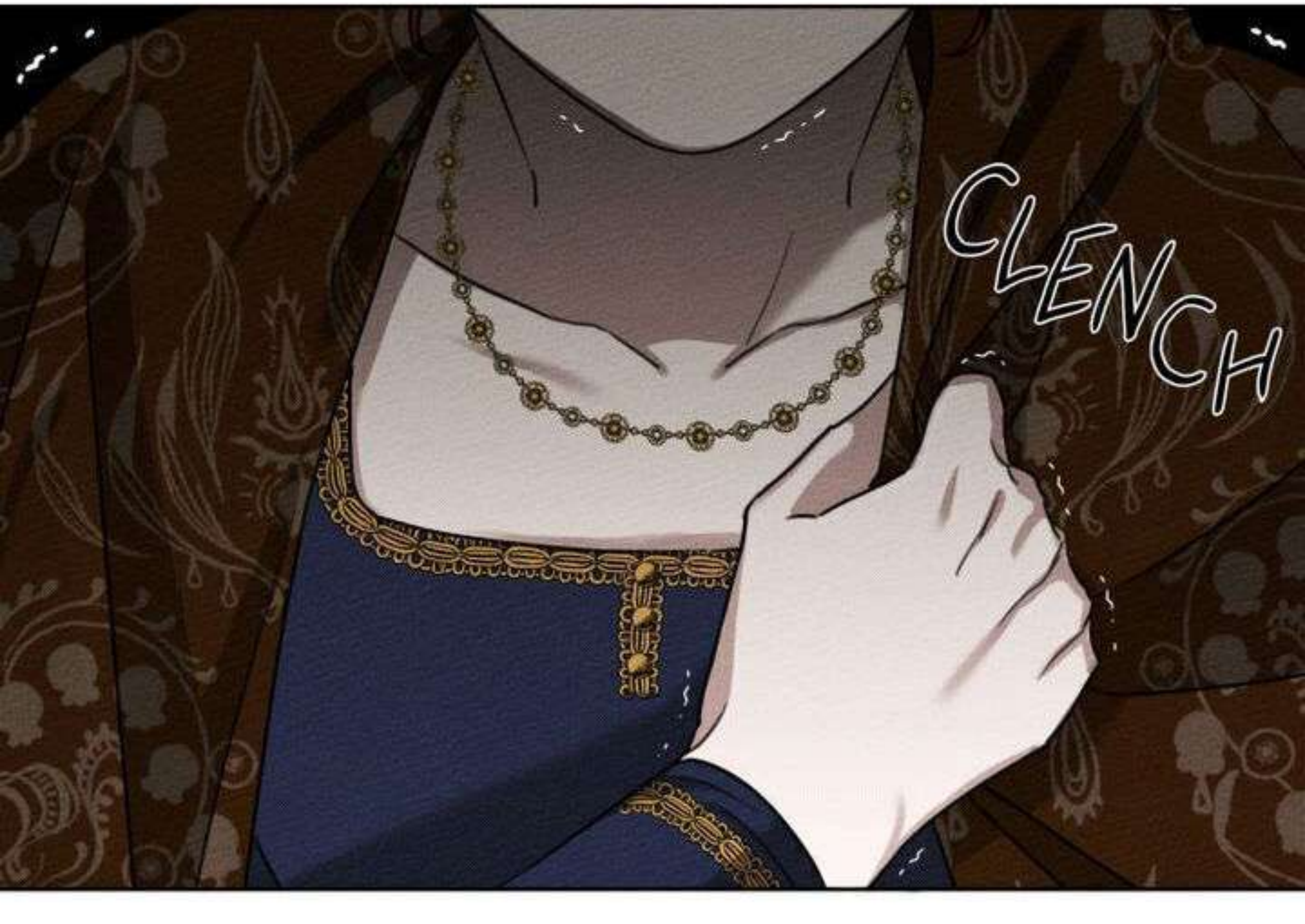

SLUMP
UGH.
MY LADY!
ARE YOU COLD? SHALL WE HEAD IN NOW?


TREMBLE
TREMBLE


DO WHATEVER YOU WANT WITH THE PLACE. THIS IS YOUR HOME NOW.


I'LL BE BACK SOON.


I DON'T WANT TO DISAPPOINT HIM!


CLENCH

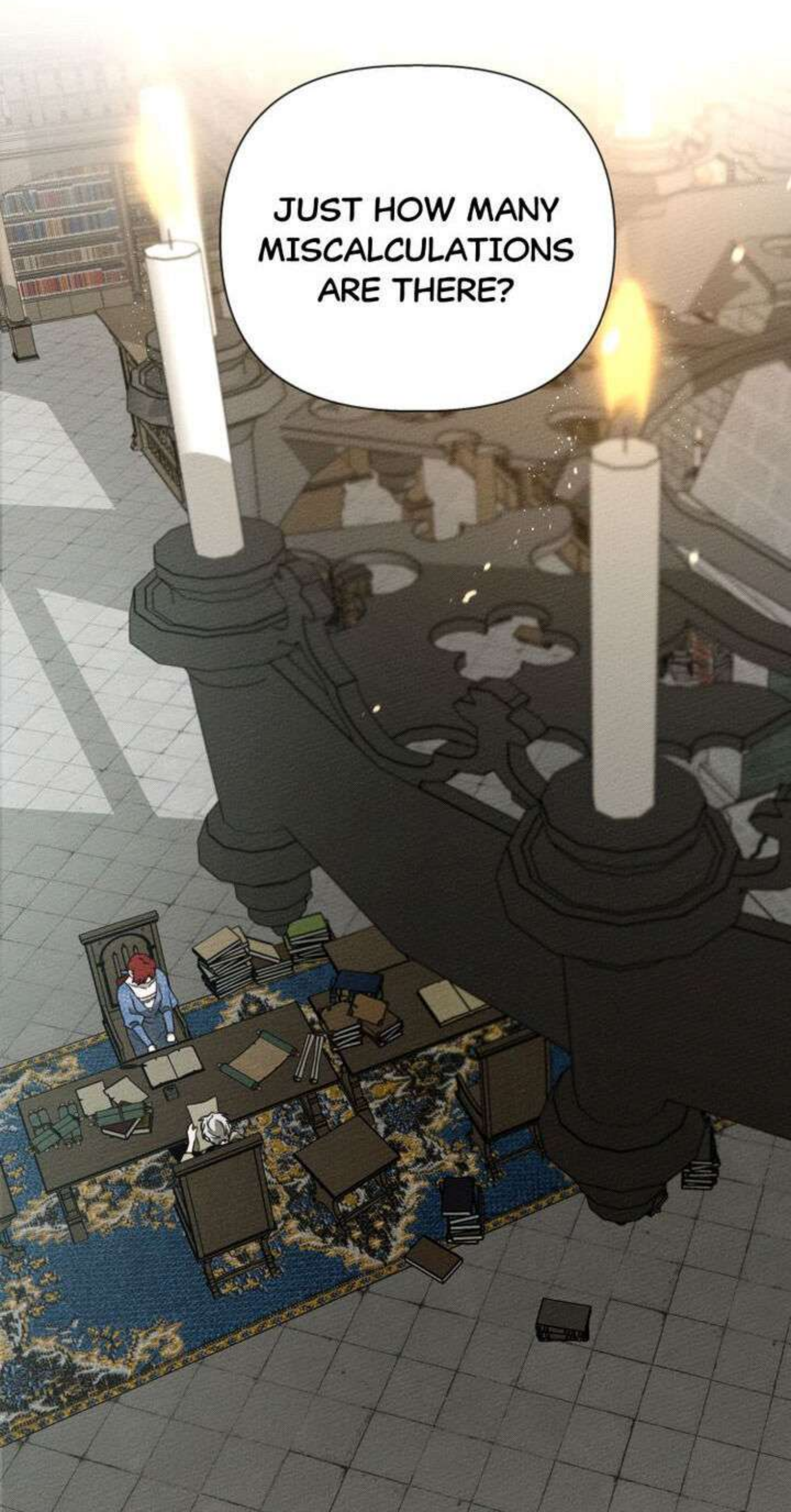
IF I DO WELL AS LADY
OF THE CASTLE,
MAYBE
HE'LL LET ME
STAY BY HIS SIDE,
EVEN WHEN HE
GROWS TIRED OF ME.

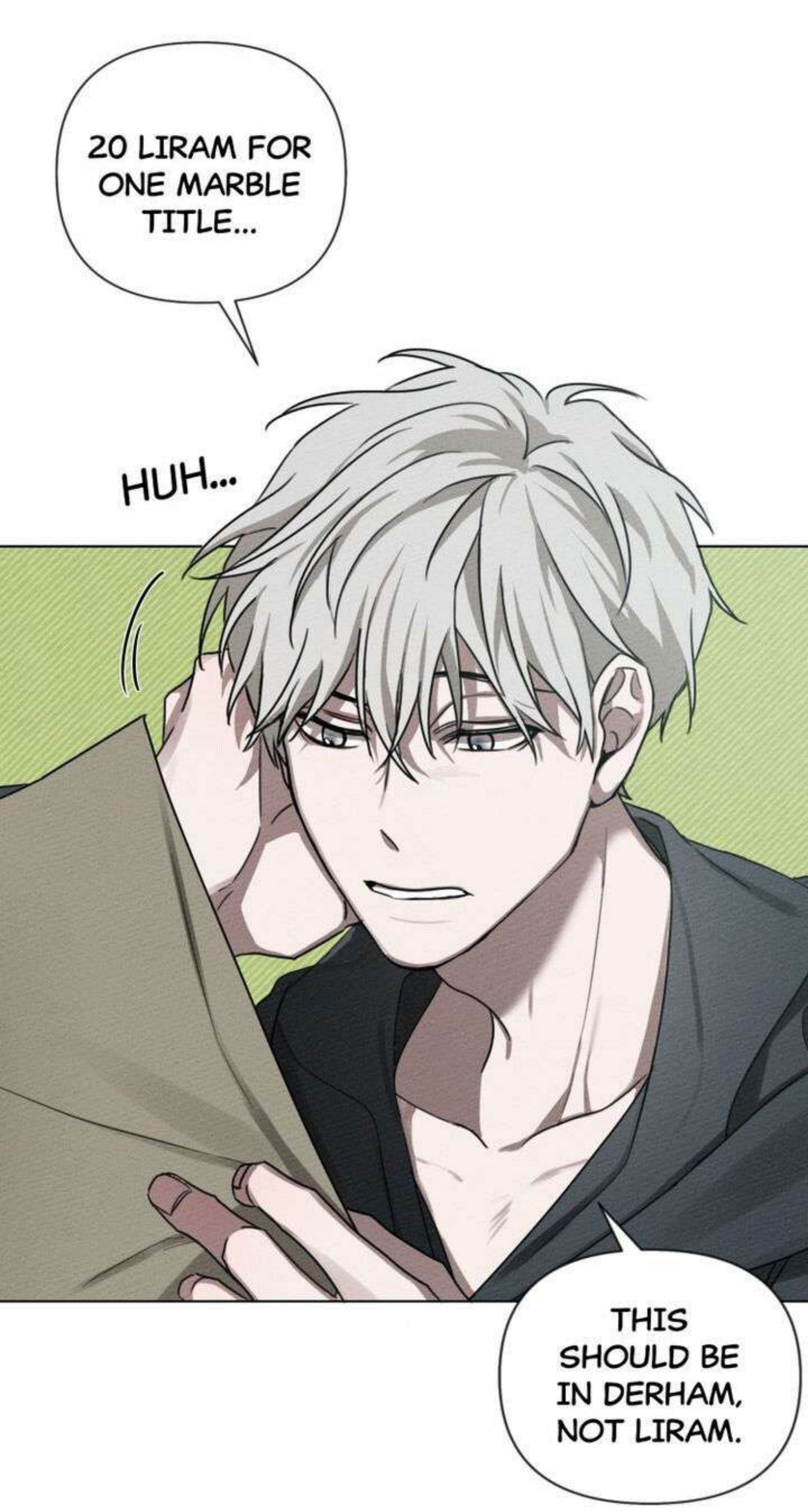
I JUST HAVE TO IMPROVE MYSELF.

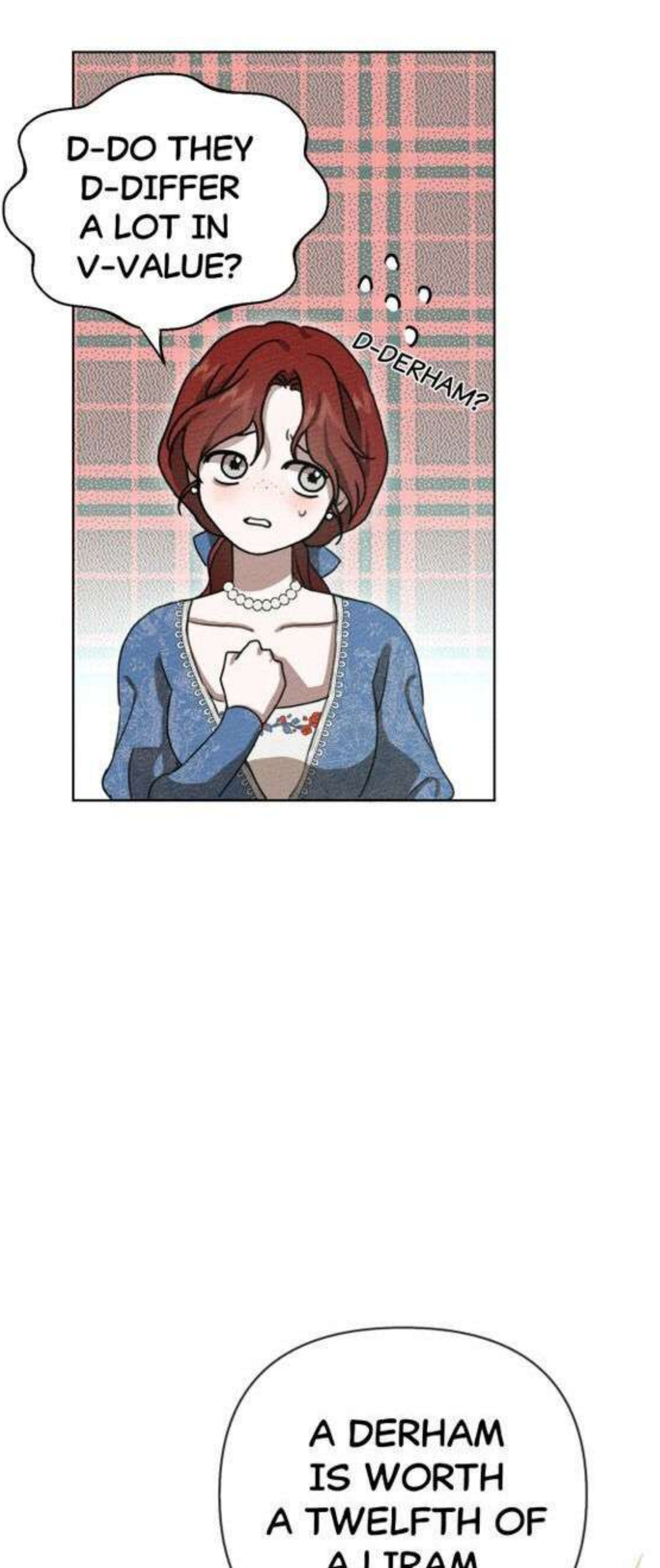
P-PLEASE SUMMON THE M-MERCHANT.

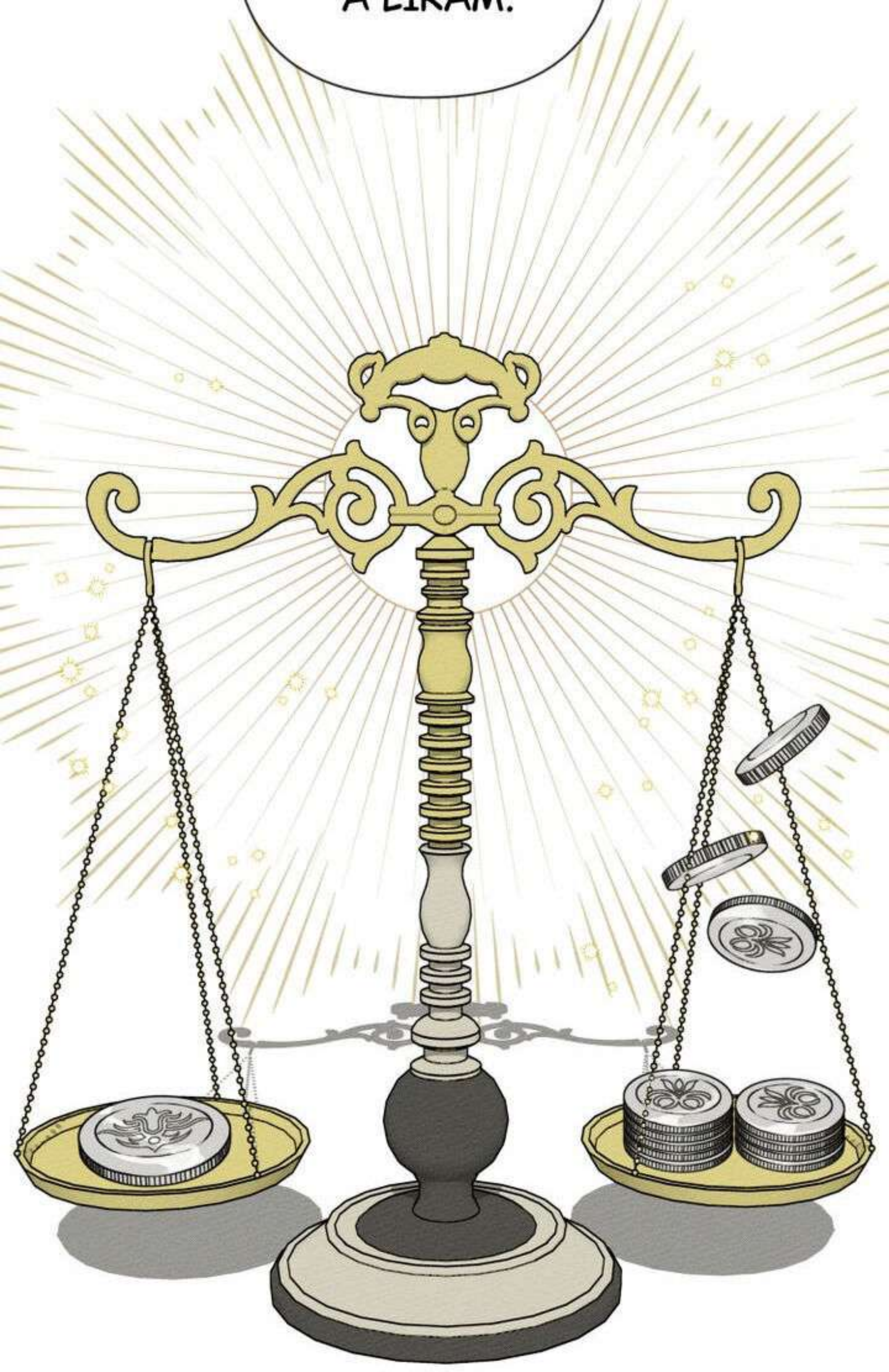
THAT WAS MY INTENTION,

BUT THIS...


JUST HOW MANY MISCALCULATIONS ARE THERE?


20 LIRAM FOR ONE MARBLE TITLE...
HUH...
THIS SHOULD BE IN DERHAM, NOT LIRAM.

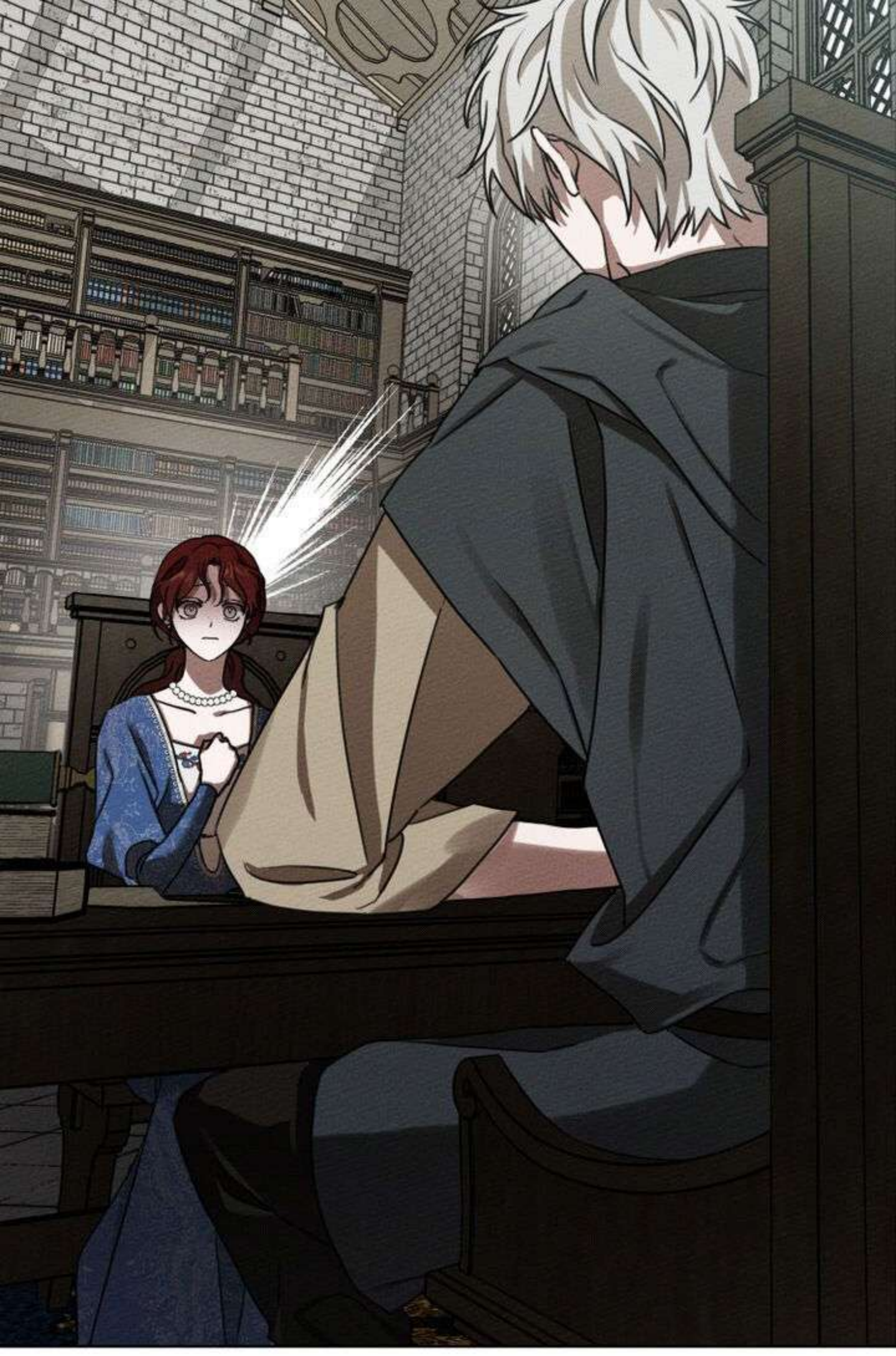

D-DO THEY D-DIFFER A LOT IN V-VALUE?
D-DERHAM?
A DERHAM IS WORTH A TWELFTH OF A LIRAM



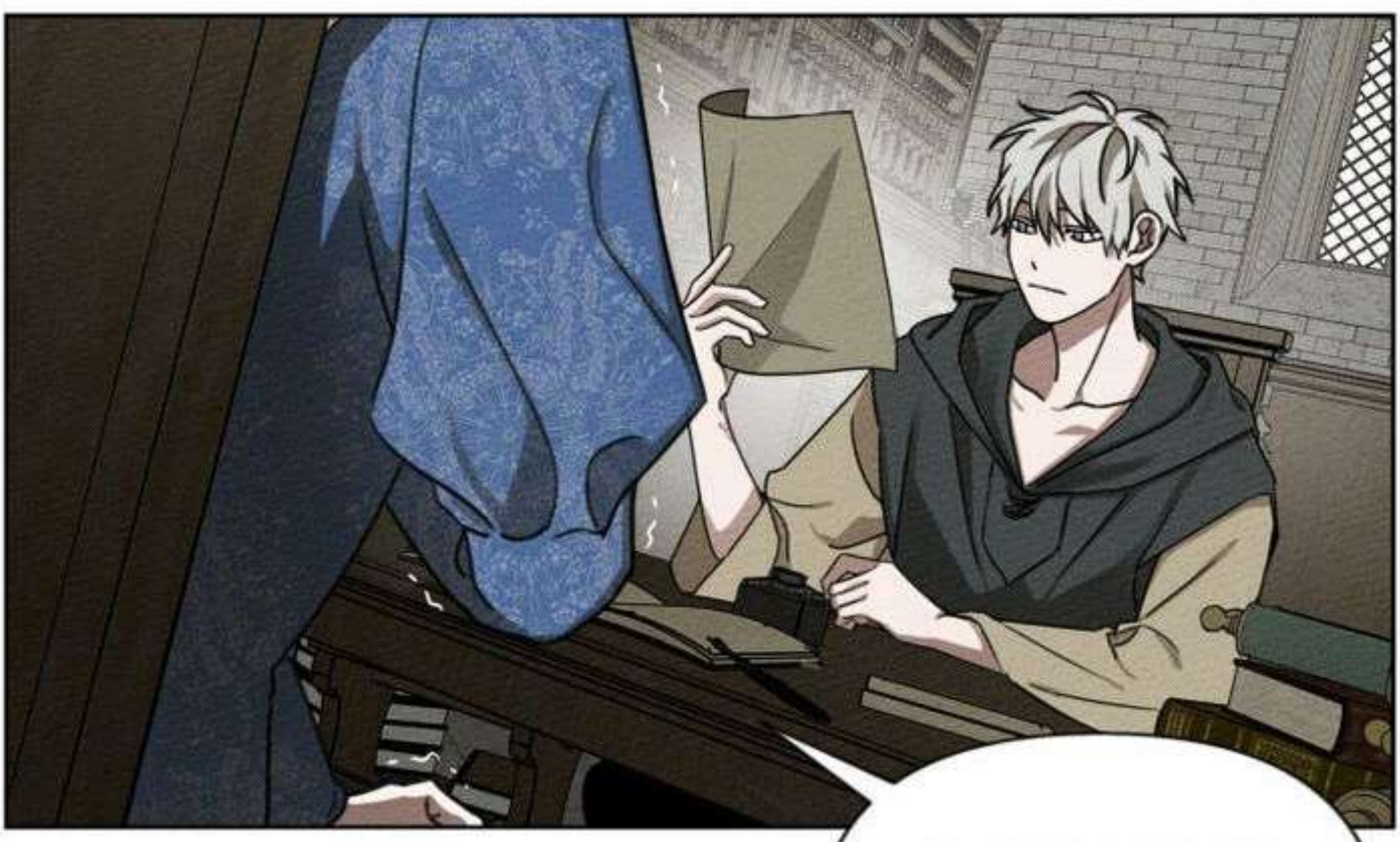
OH
SO, LIRAM X 12 = 1 DERHAM...?

IF WHAT YOU WROTE IS CORRECT, THEN SIR RIFTAN...

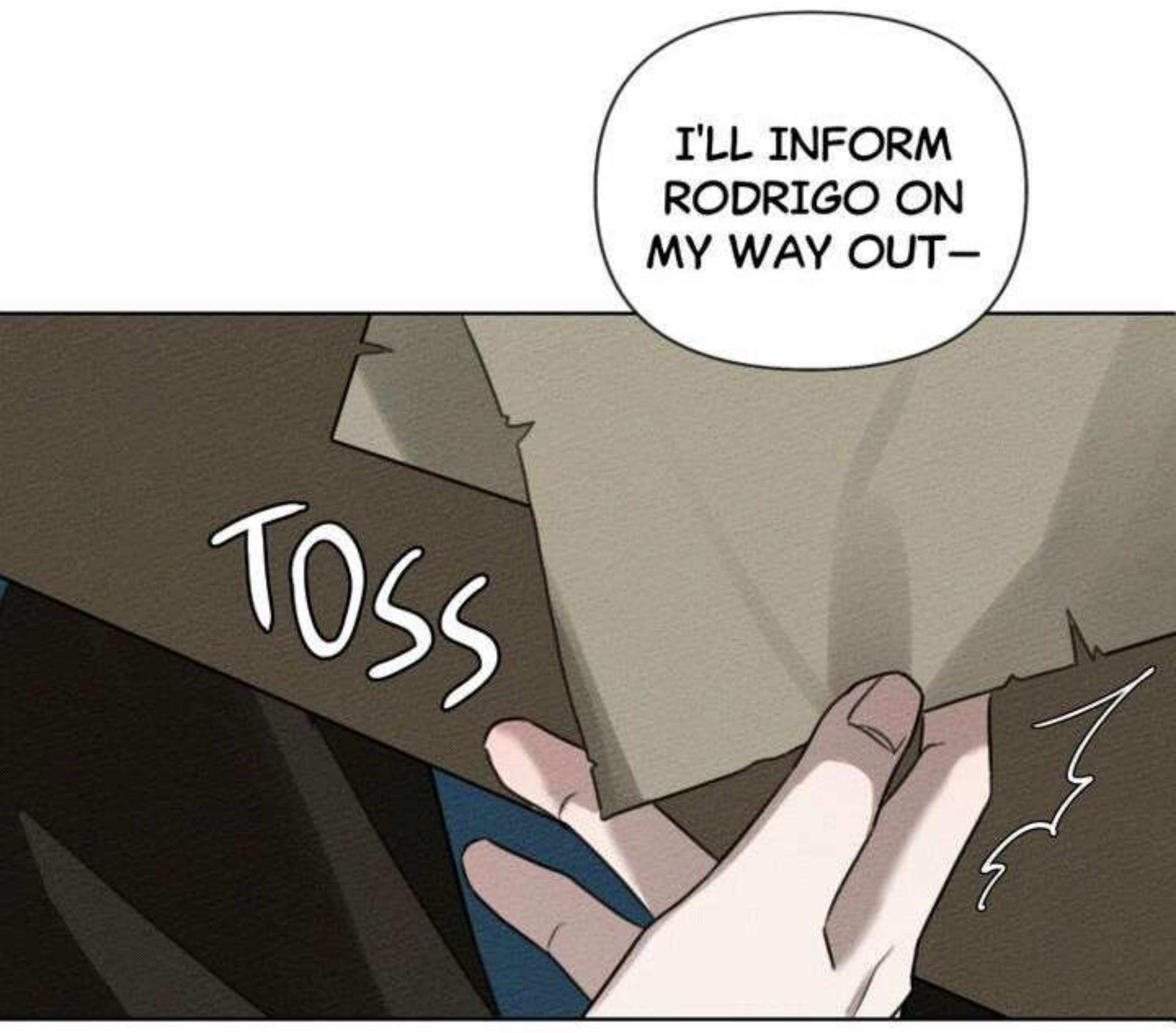
WILL SOON BE PENNILESS AND NEED TO START SEARCHING FOR DRAGON LAIRS TO RAID.

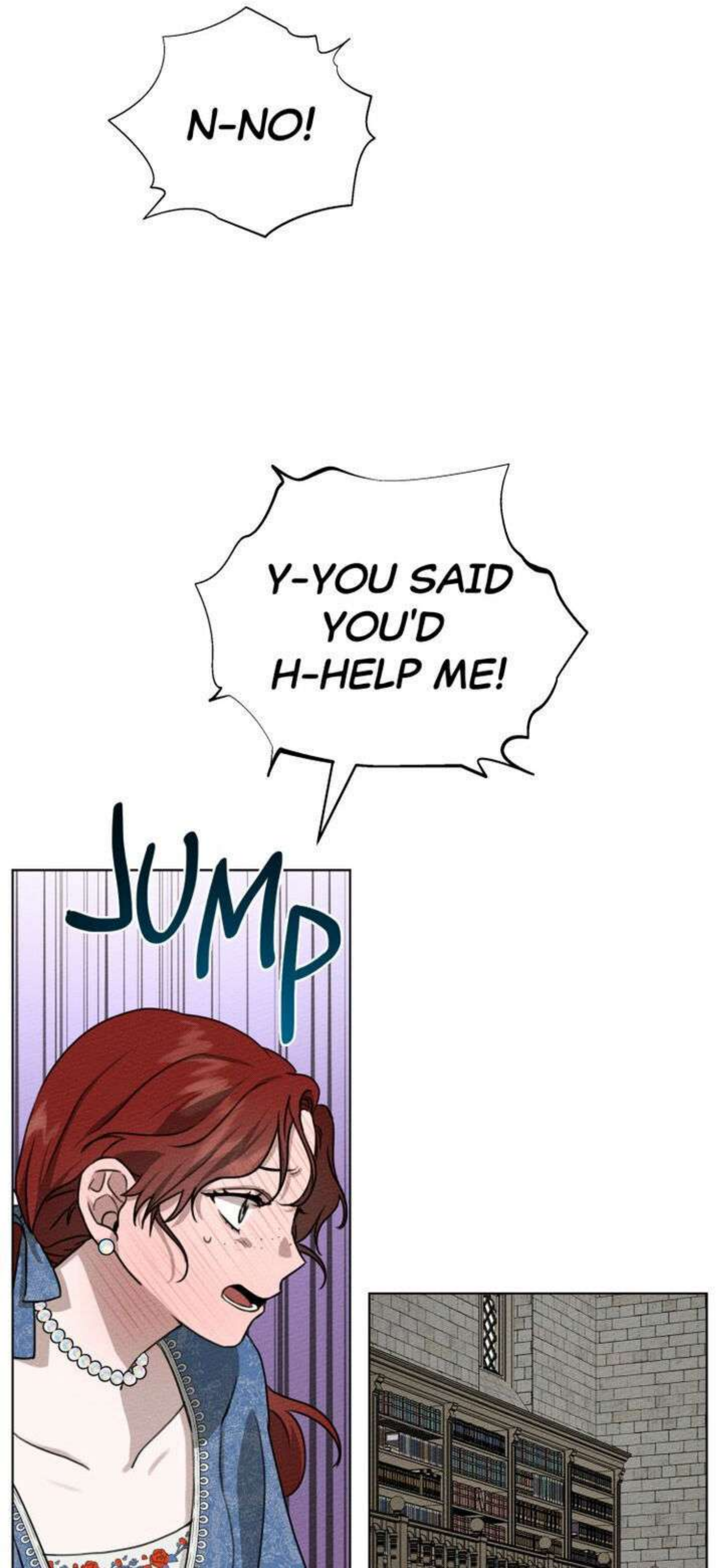


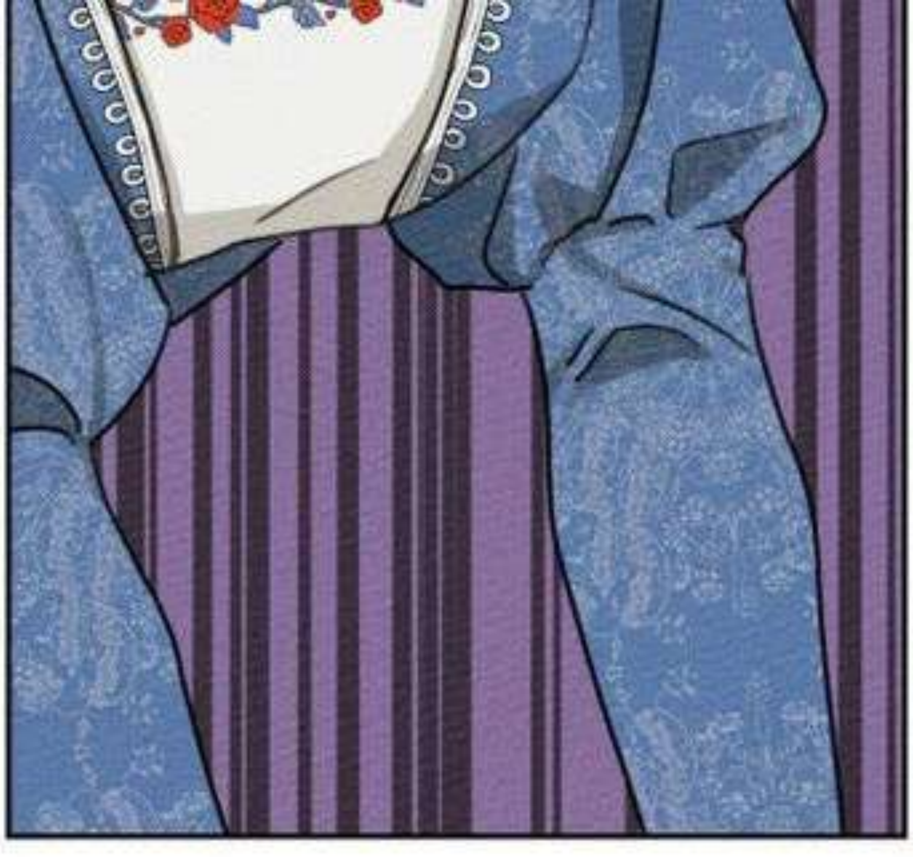
I-I'M JUST...

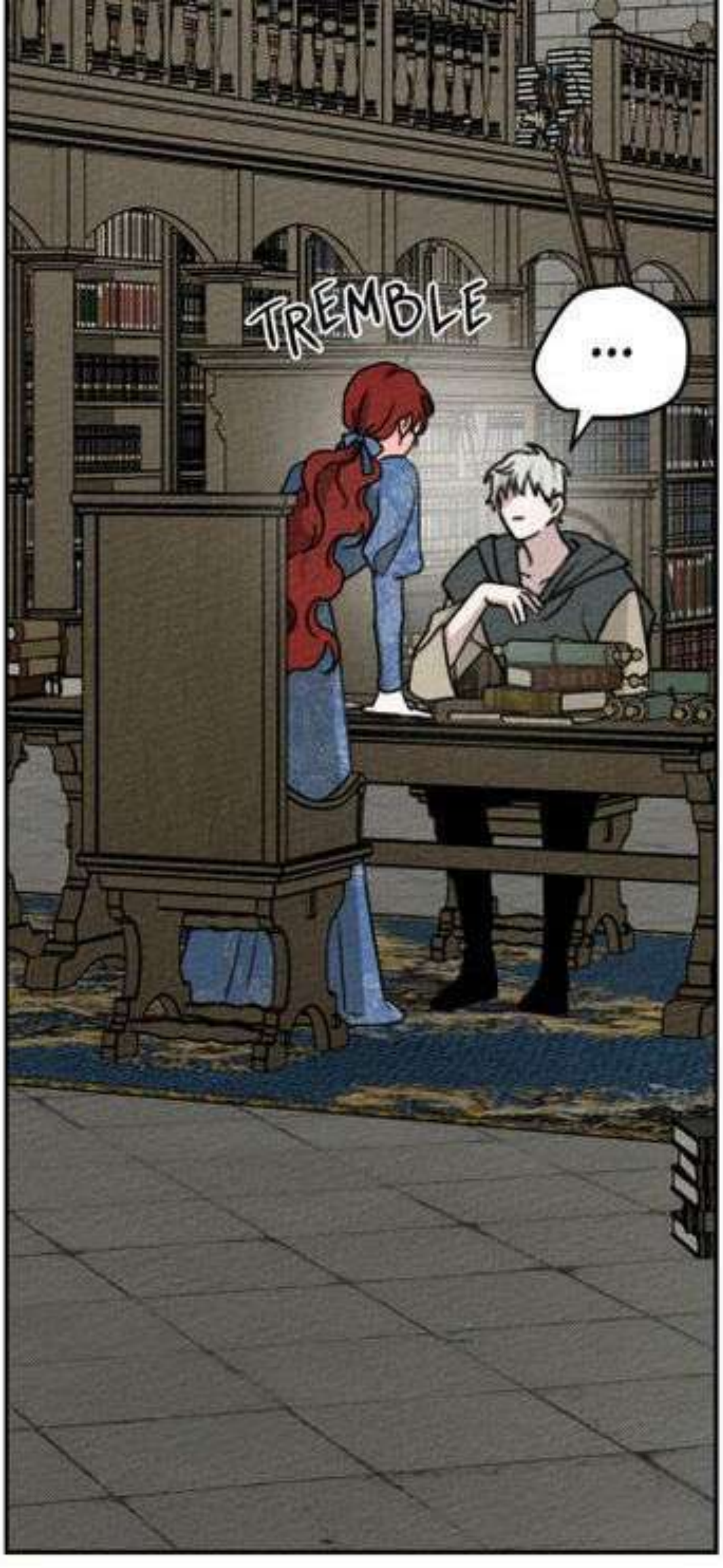


N-NOT USED TO M-MANAGING THE L-LEDGER YET.
JUST TELL THEM YOU CAN'T DO IT. THEY'LL UNDERSTAND.


I'LL INFORM RODRIGO ON MY WAY OUT—
TOSS

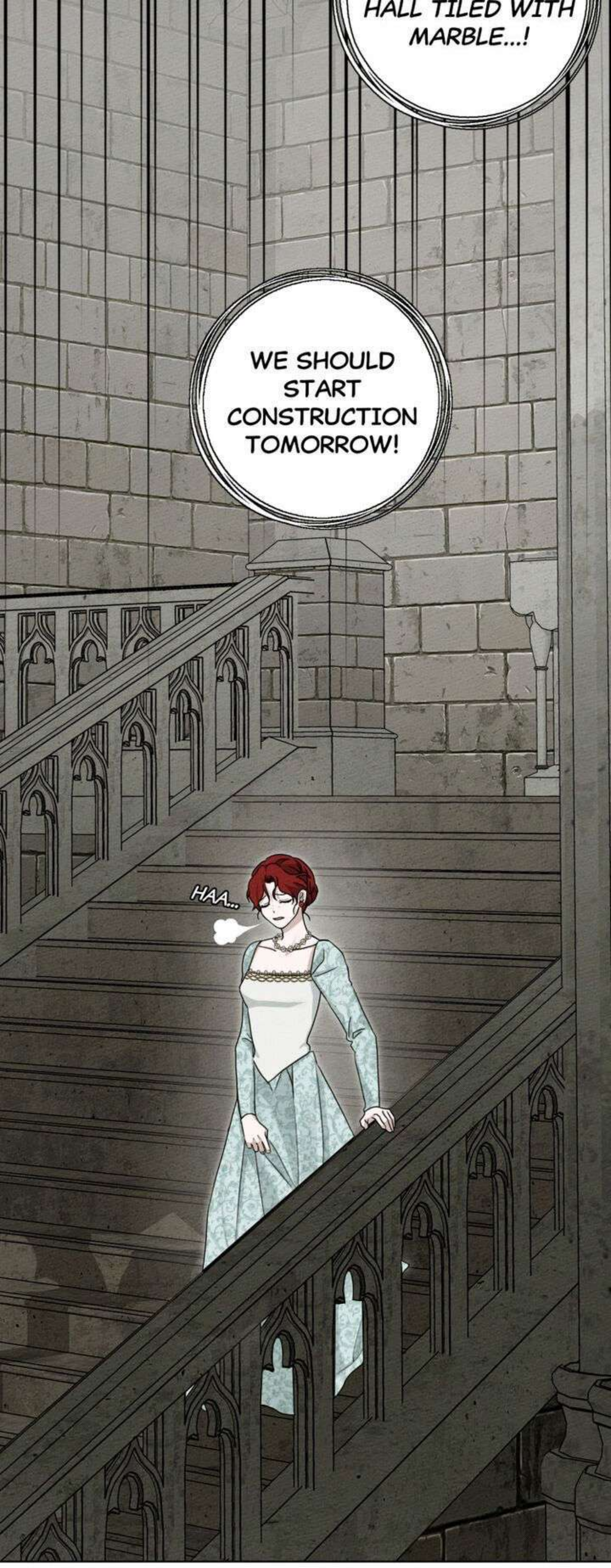

N-NO!
Y-YOU SAID YOU'D H-HELP ME!
JUMP

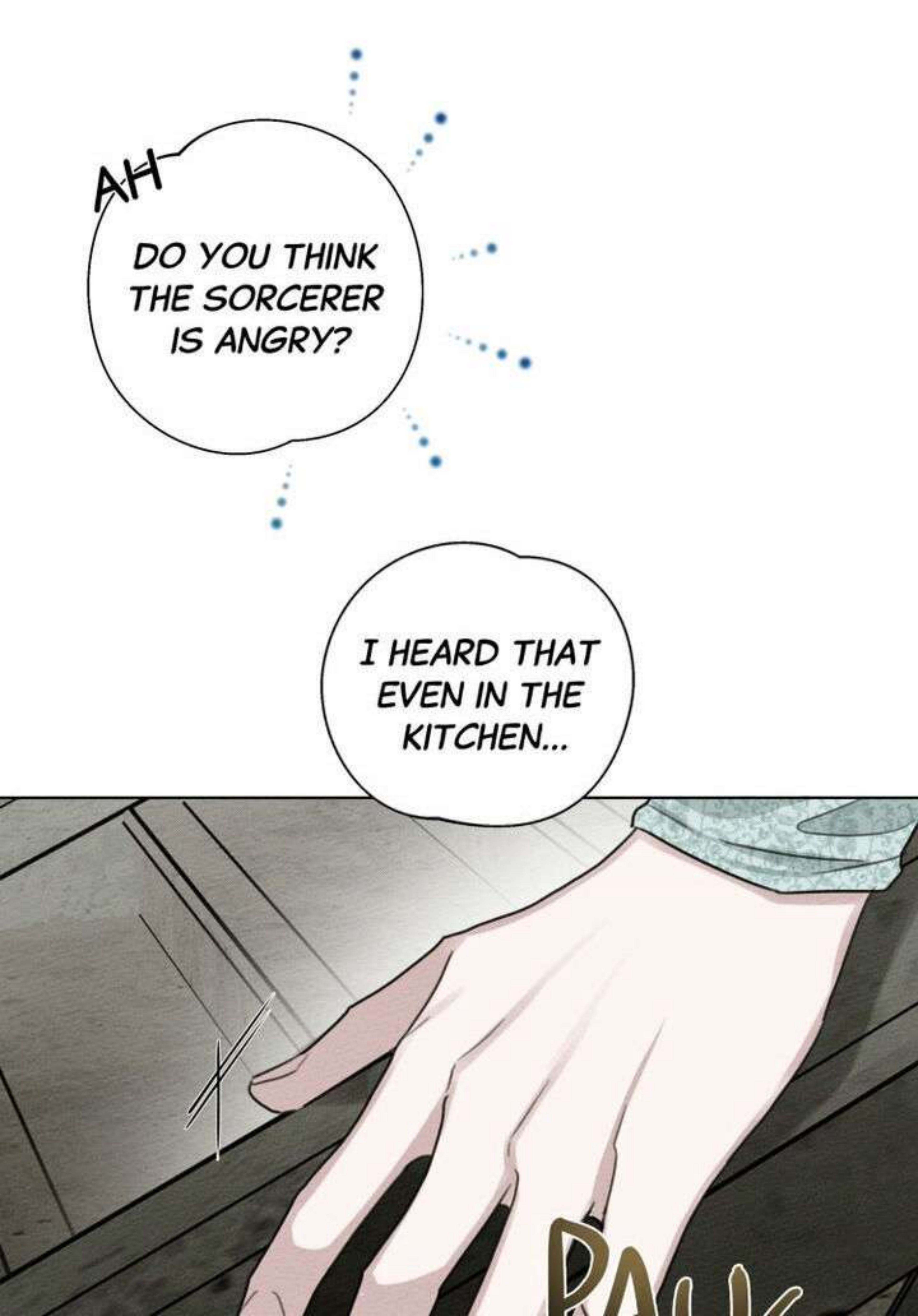




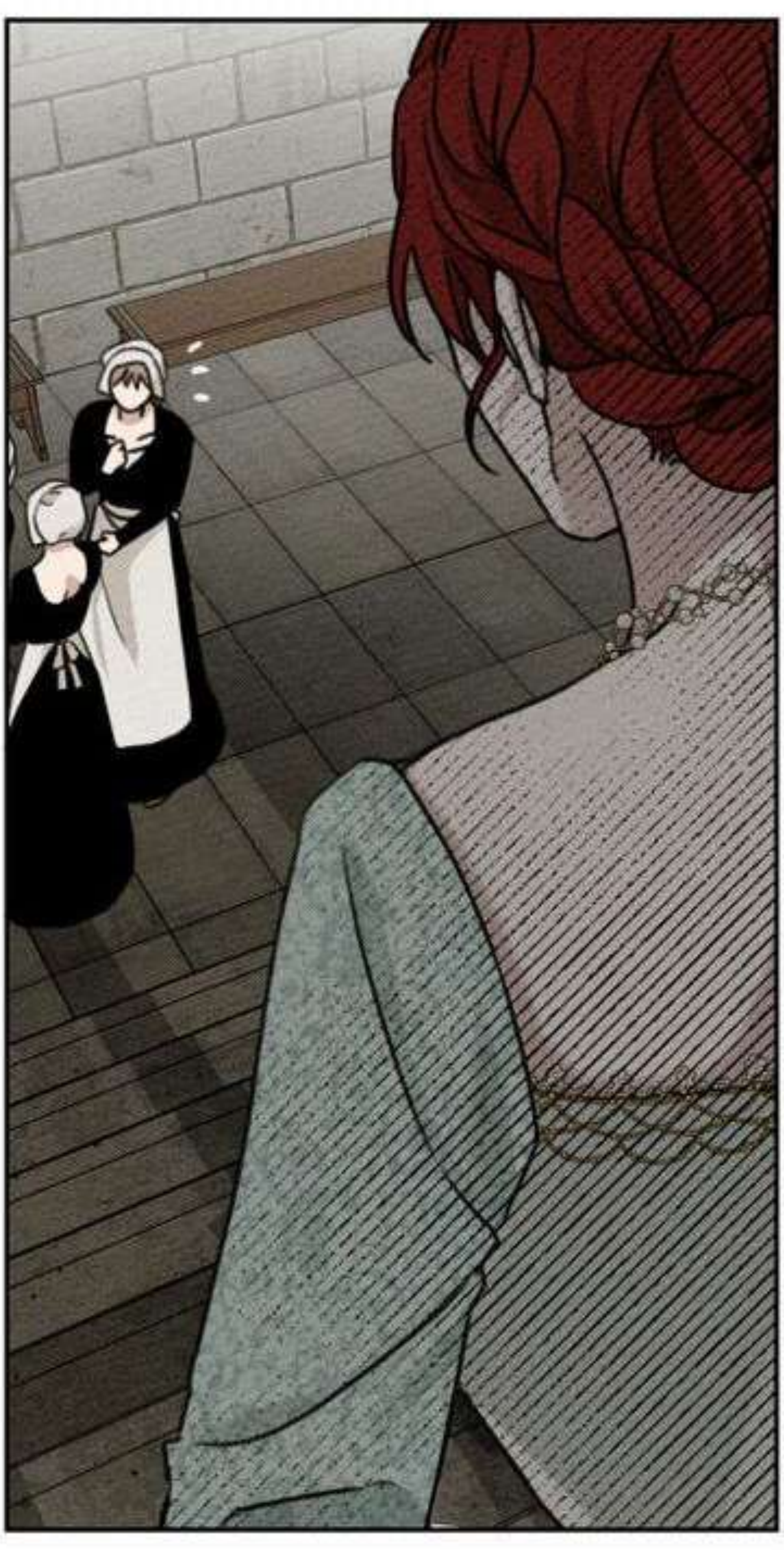
SO A FEW DAYS AGO...

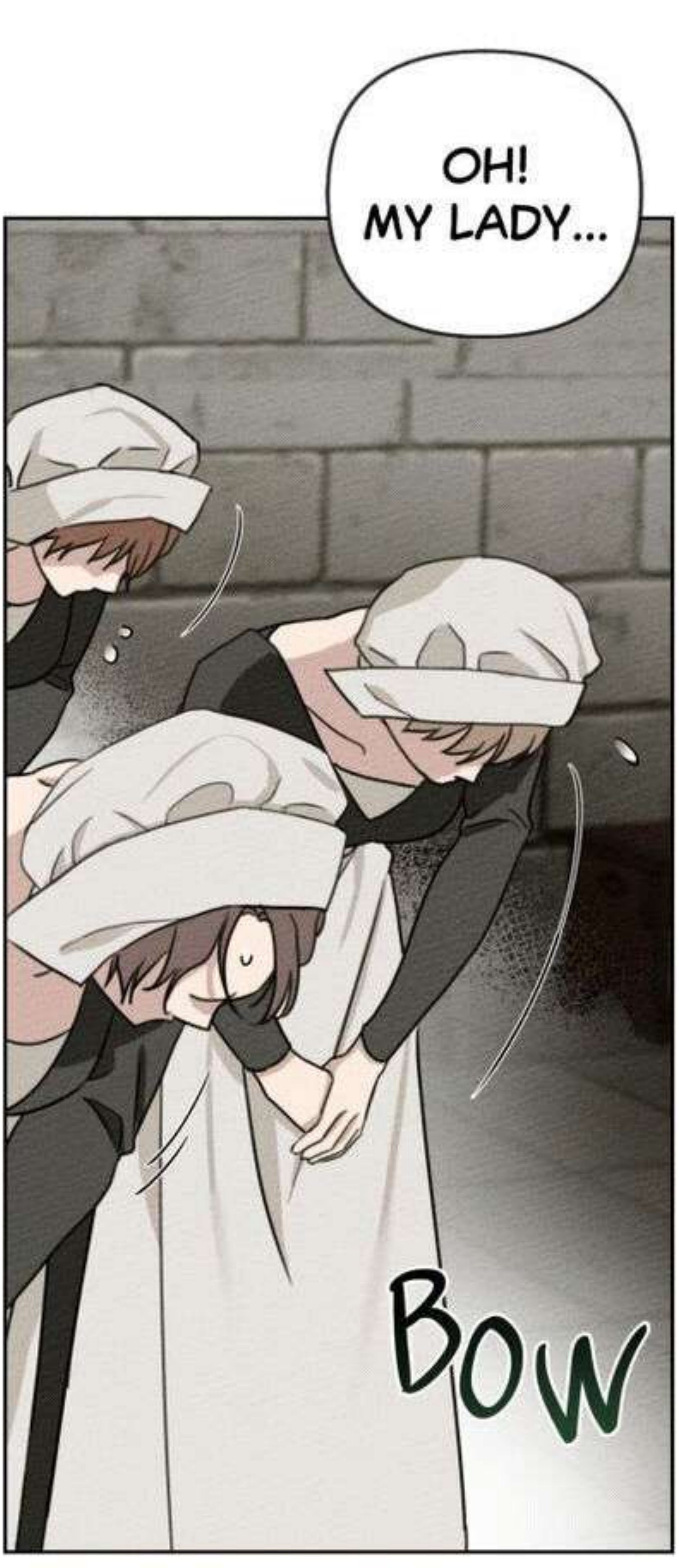
THEN, YOU WISH TO CHANGE ALL THE WINDOWS TO GLASS...
AND HAVE THE BANQUET

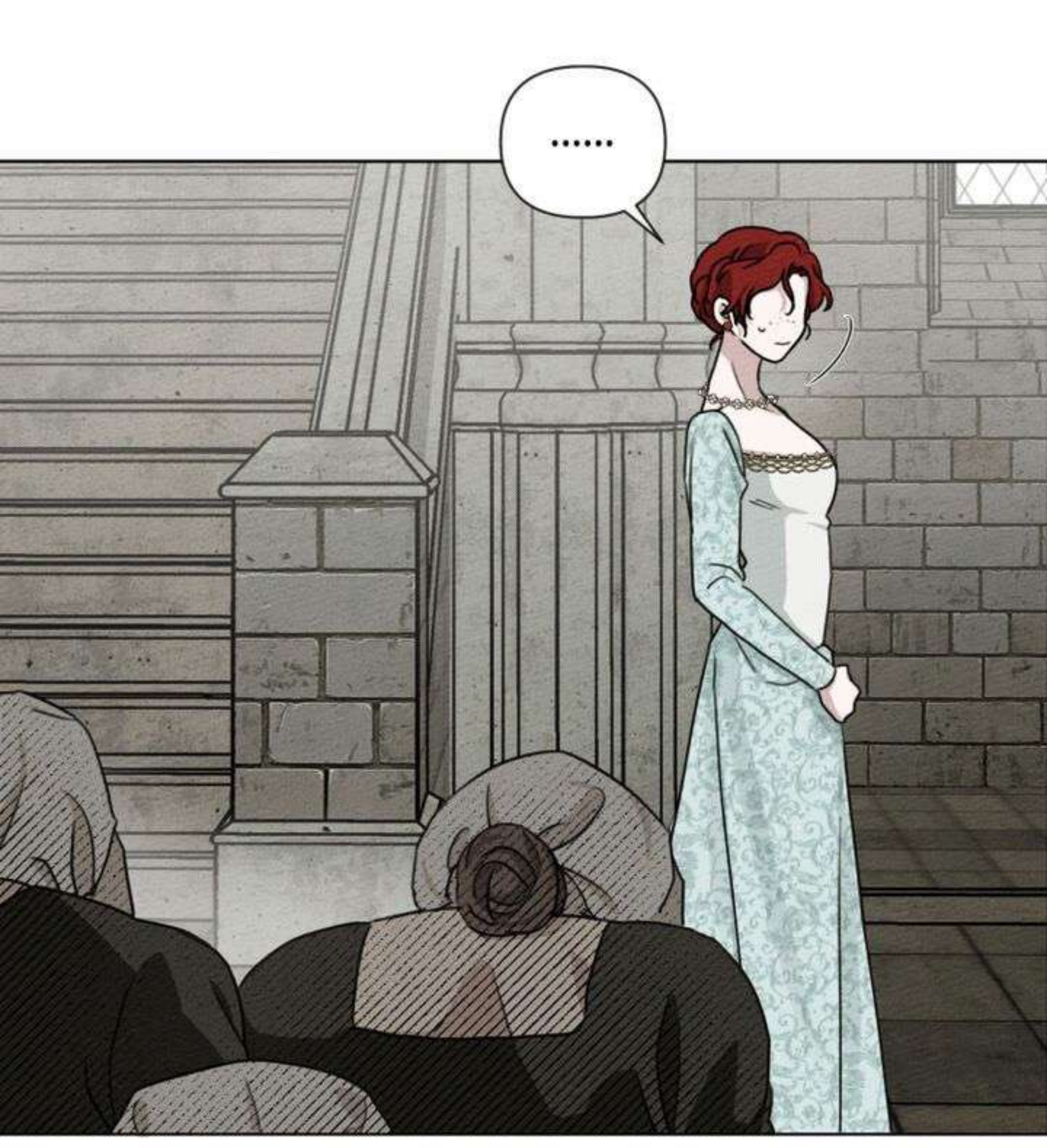

HALL TILED WITH
MARBLE...!
WE SHOULD START CONSTRUCTION TOMORROW!
HAA...

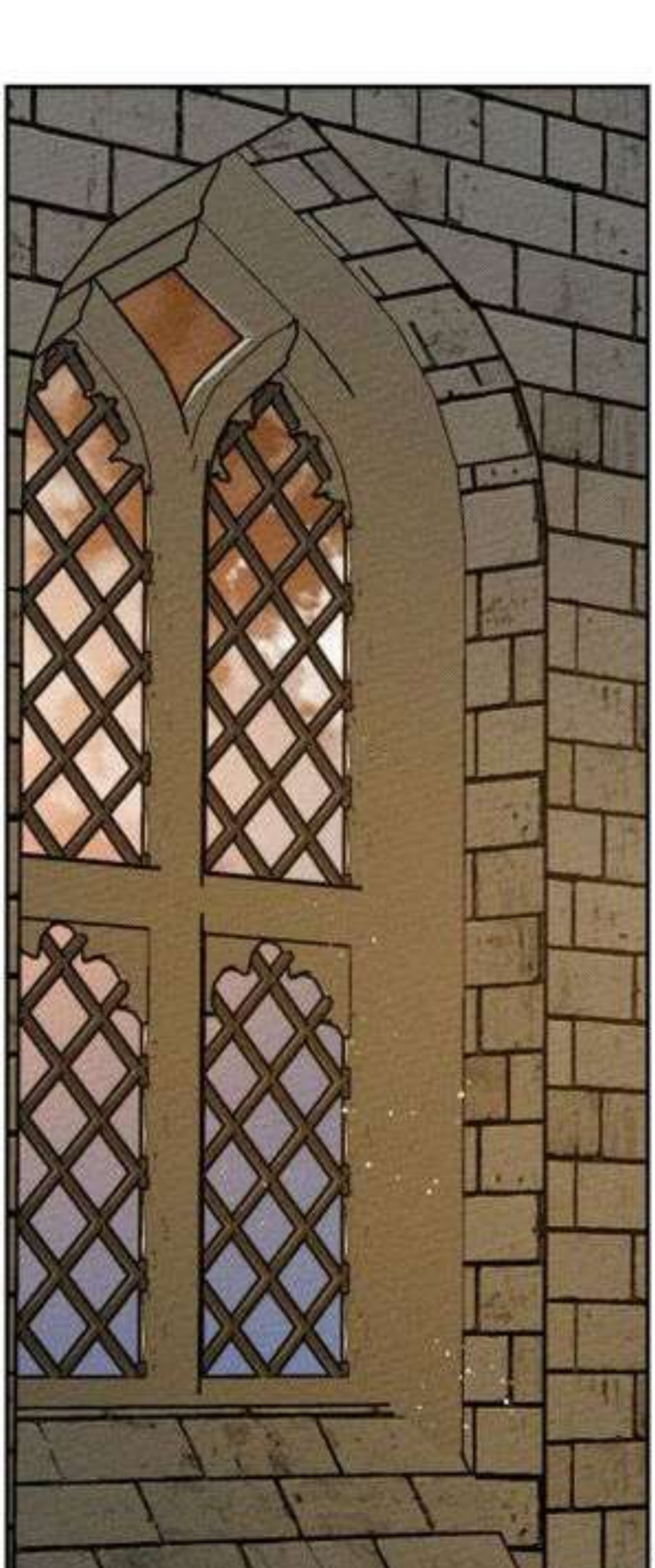

AH
DO YOU THINK THE SORCERER IS ANGRY?
I HEARD THAT EVEN IN THE KITCHEN...
PAUK

PAUSE

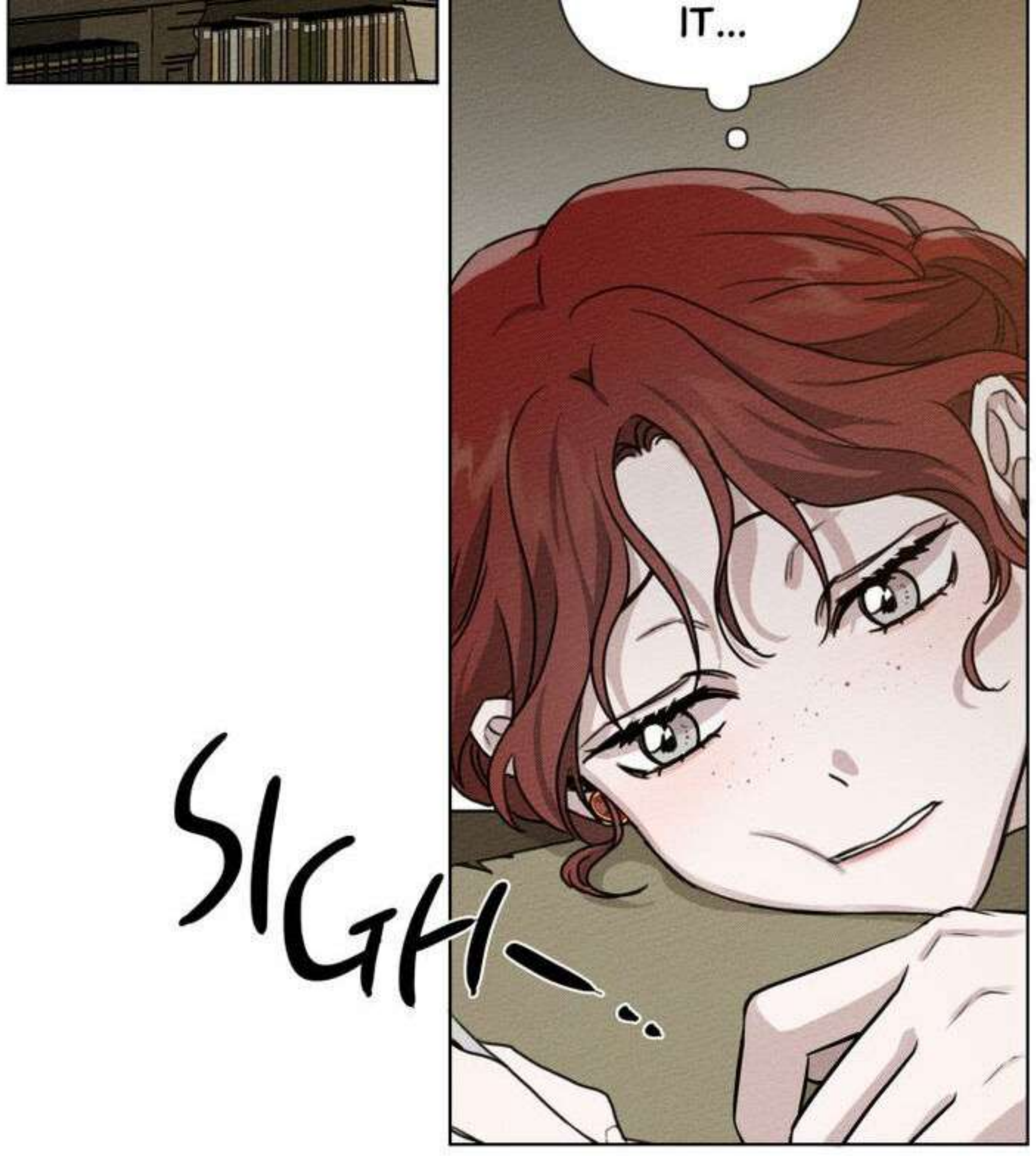



OH!
MY LADY...
BOW

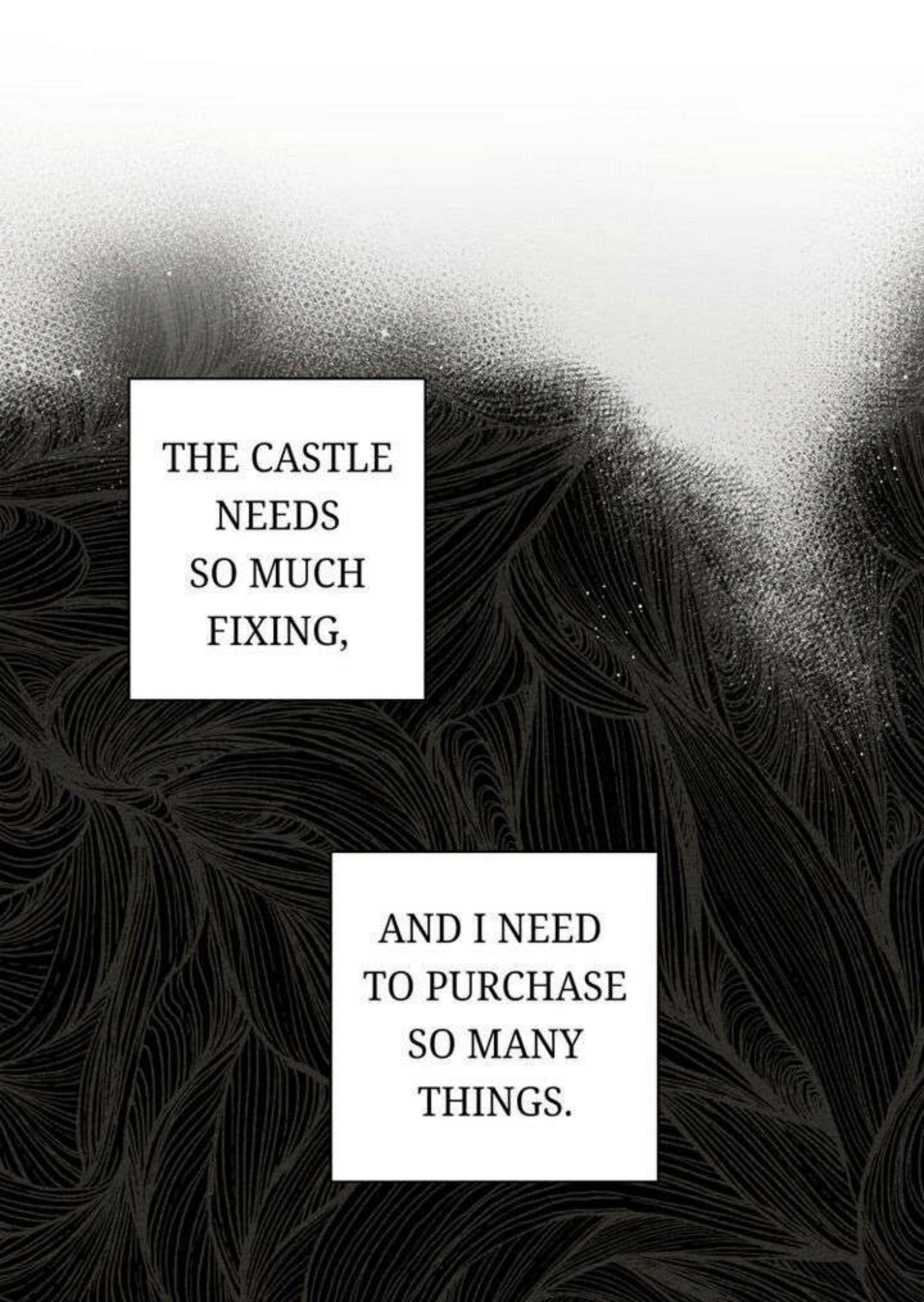

......

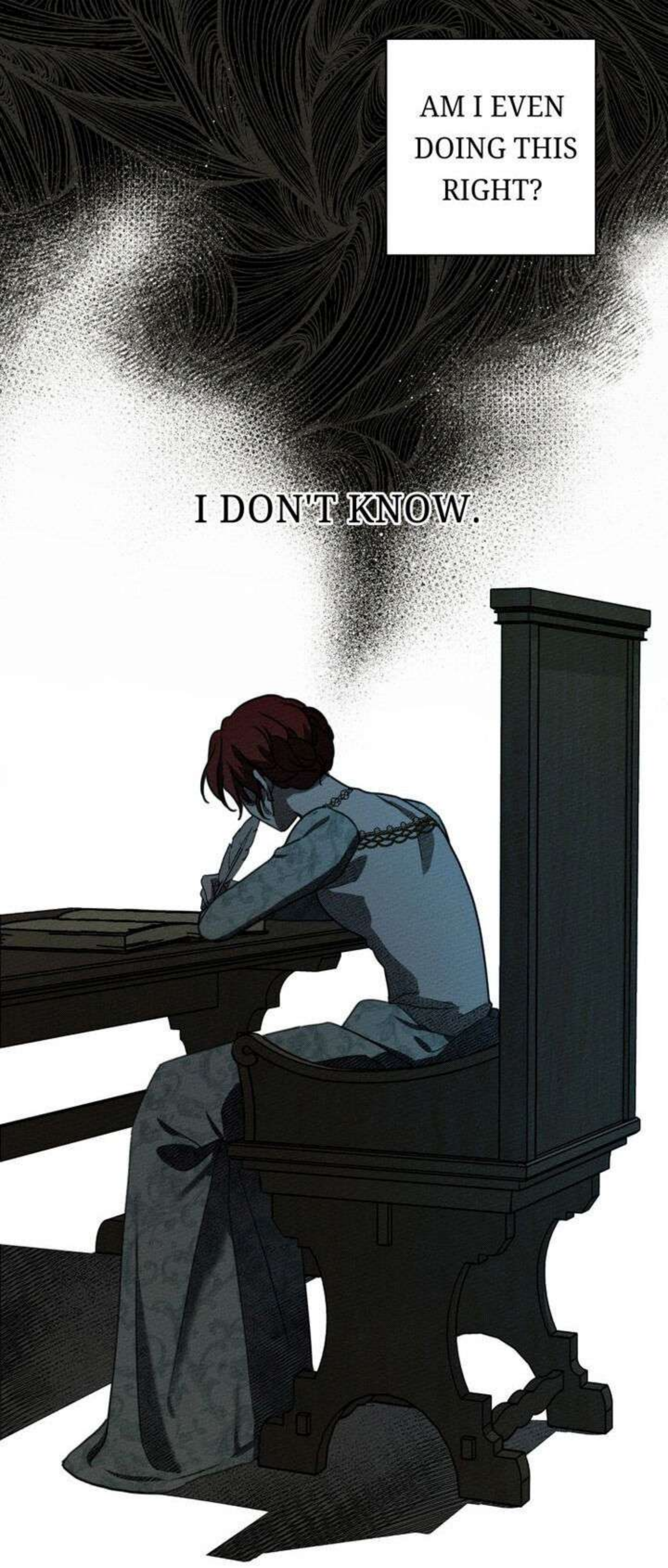


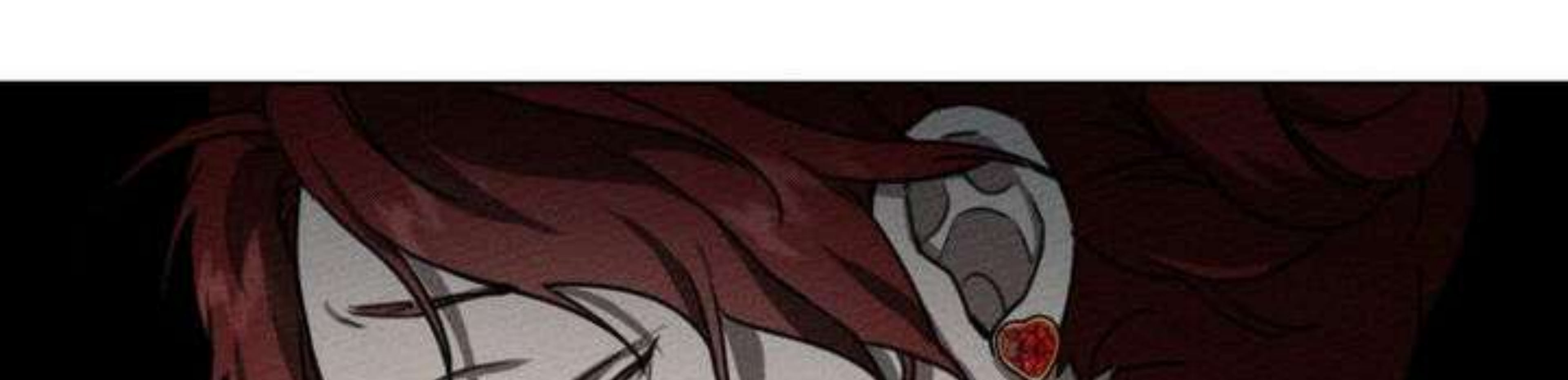
I STILL DON'T GET

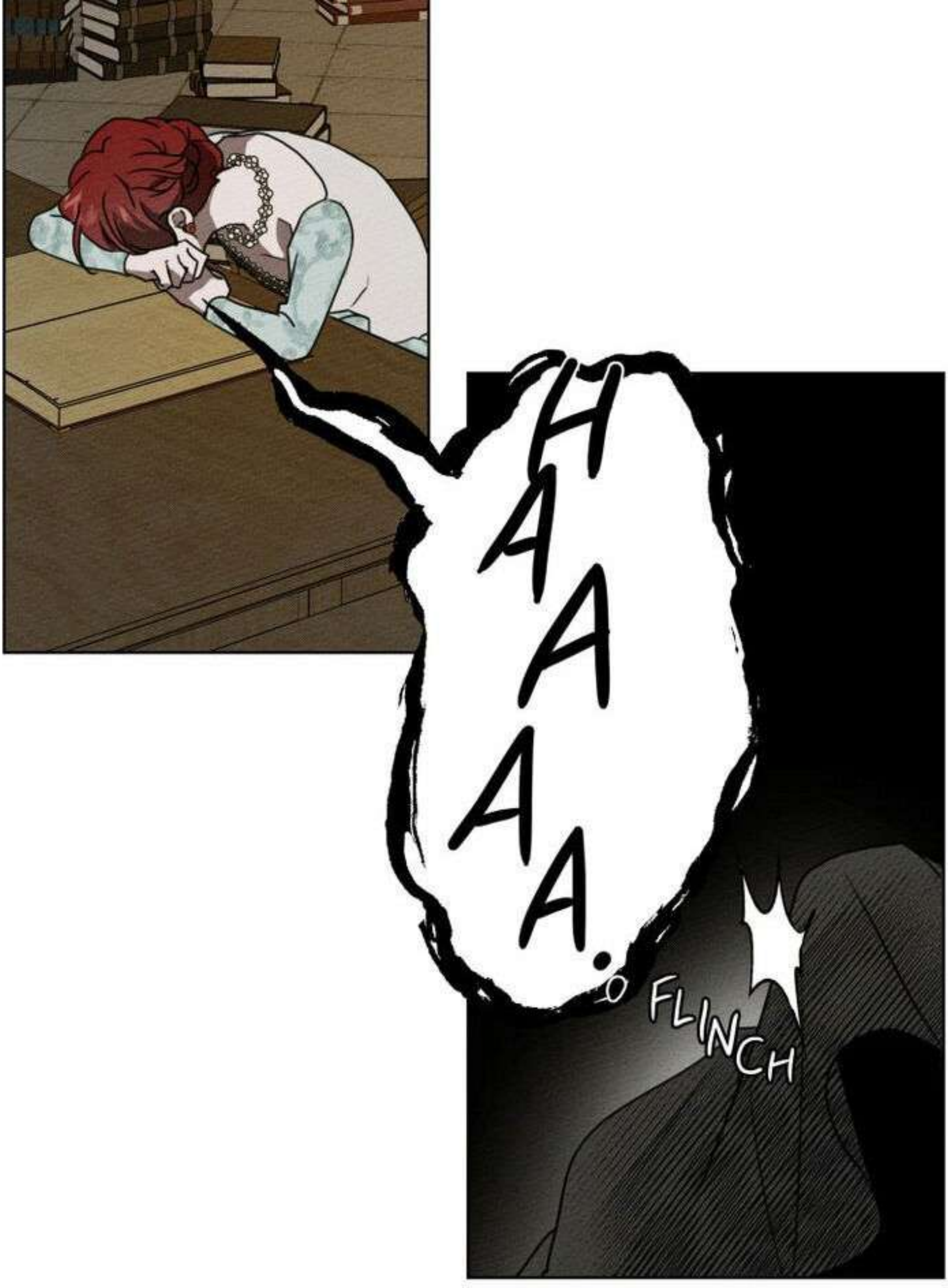

IT...
SIGH-...

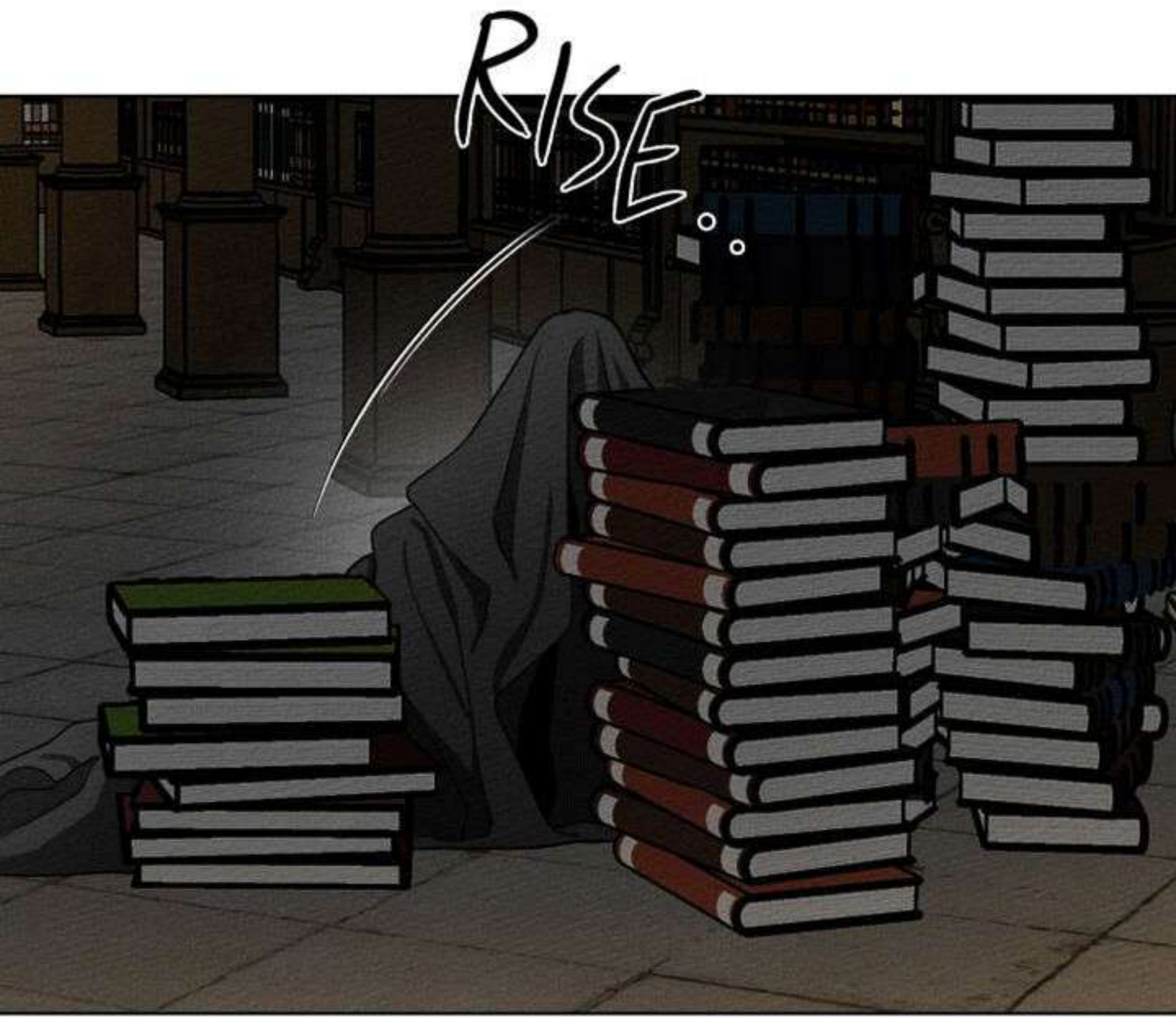
AM I REALLY THAT HOPELESS?

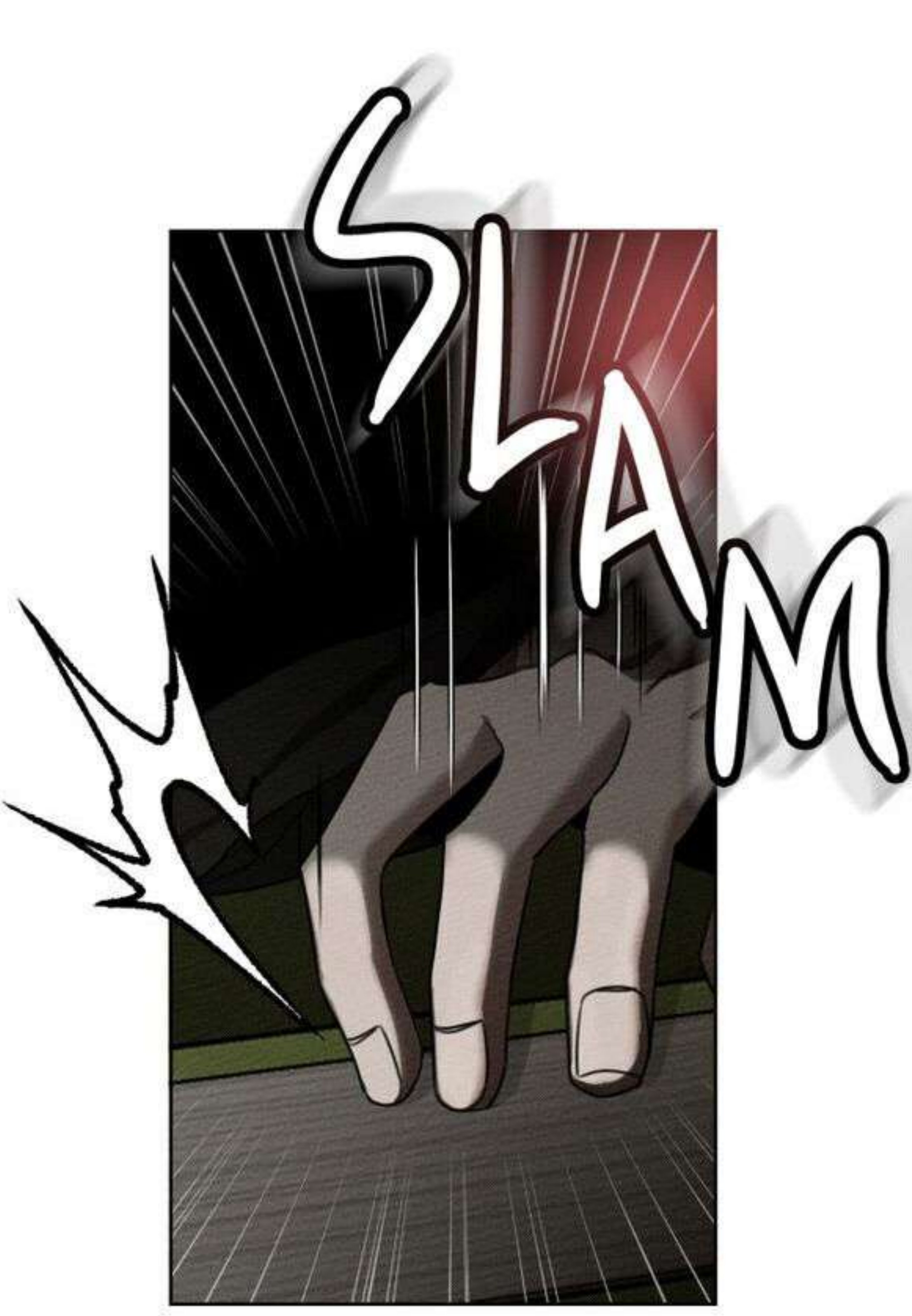

THE CASTLE NEEDS SO MUCH FIXING,
AND I NEED TO PURCHASE SO MANY THINGS.


AM I EVEN DOING THIS RIGHT?
I DON'T KNOW.

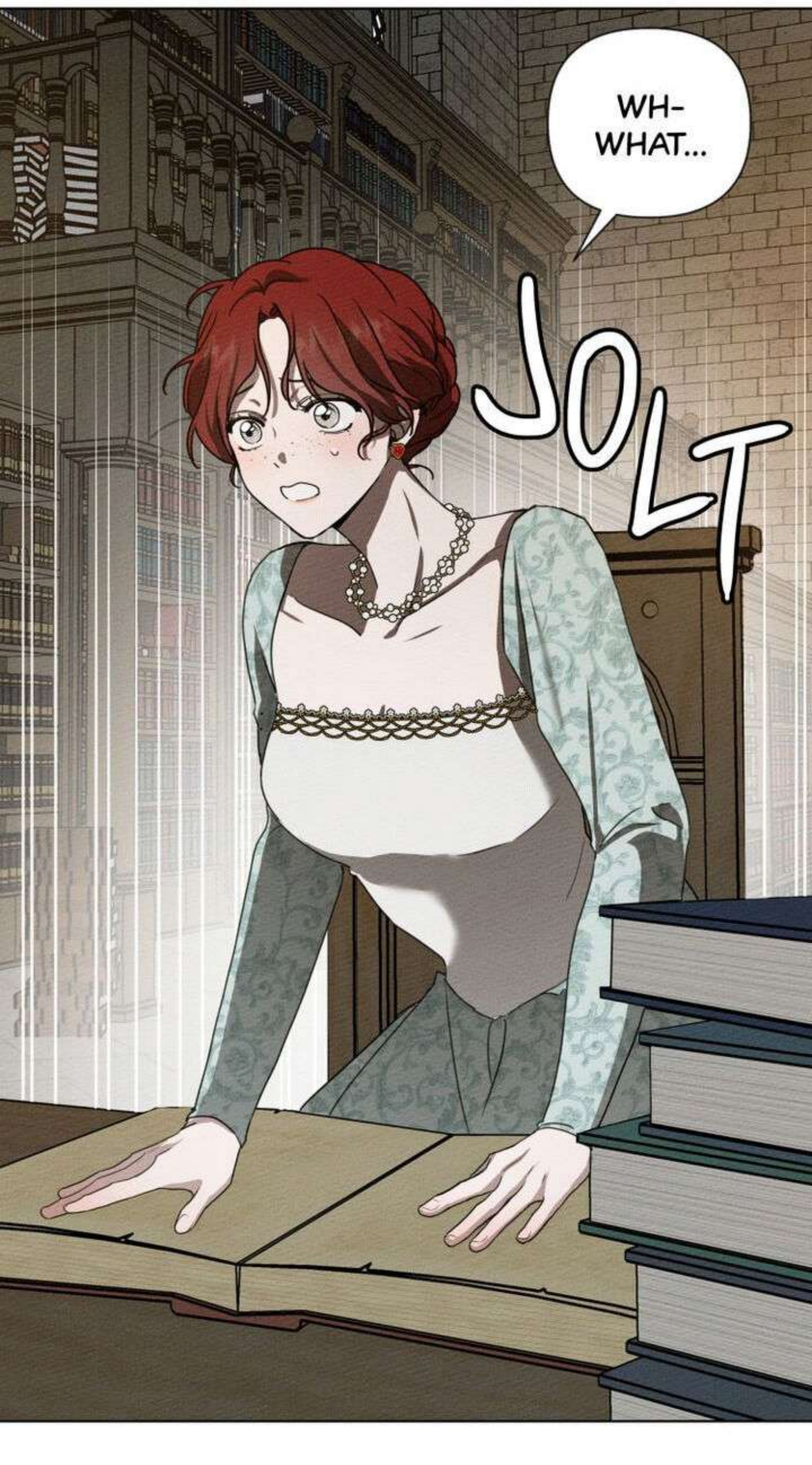


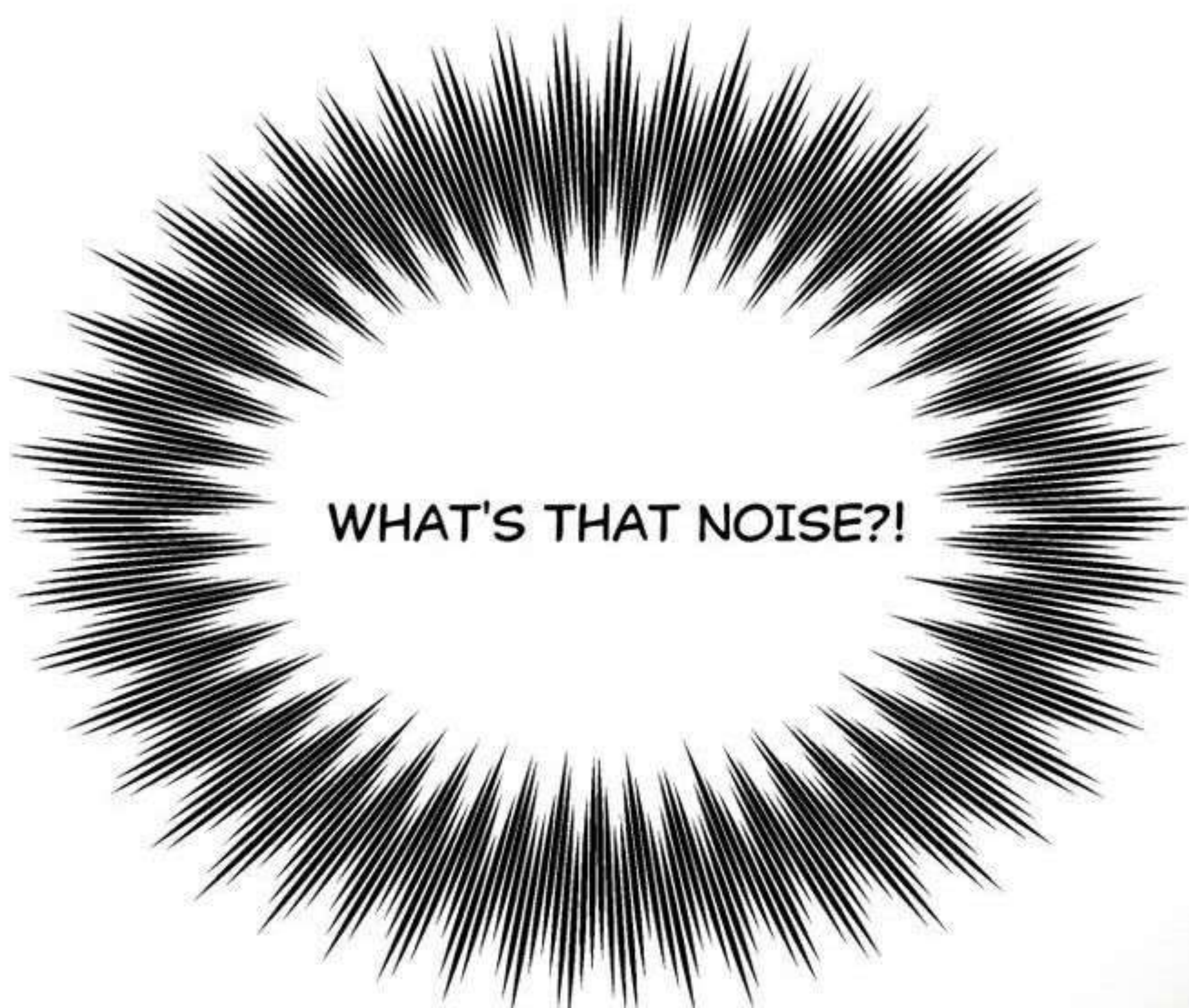

HAAAAA.
FLINCH

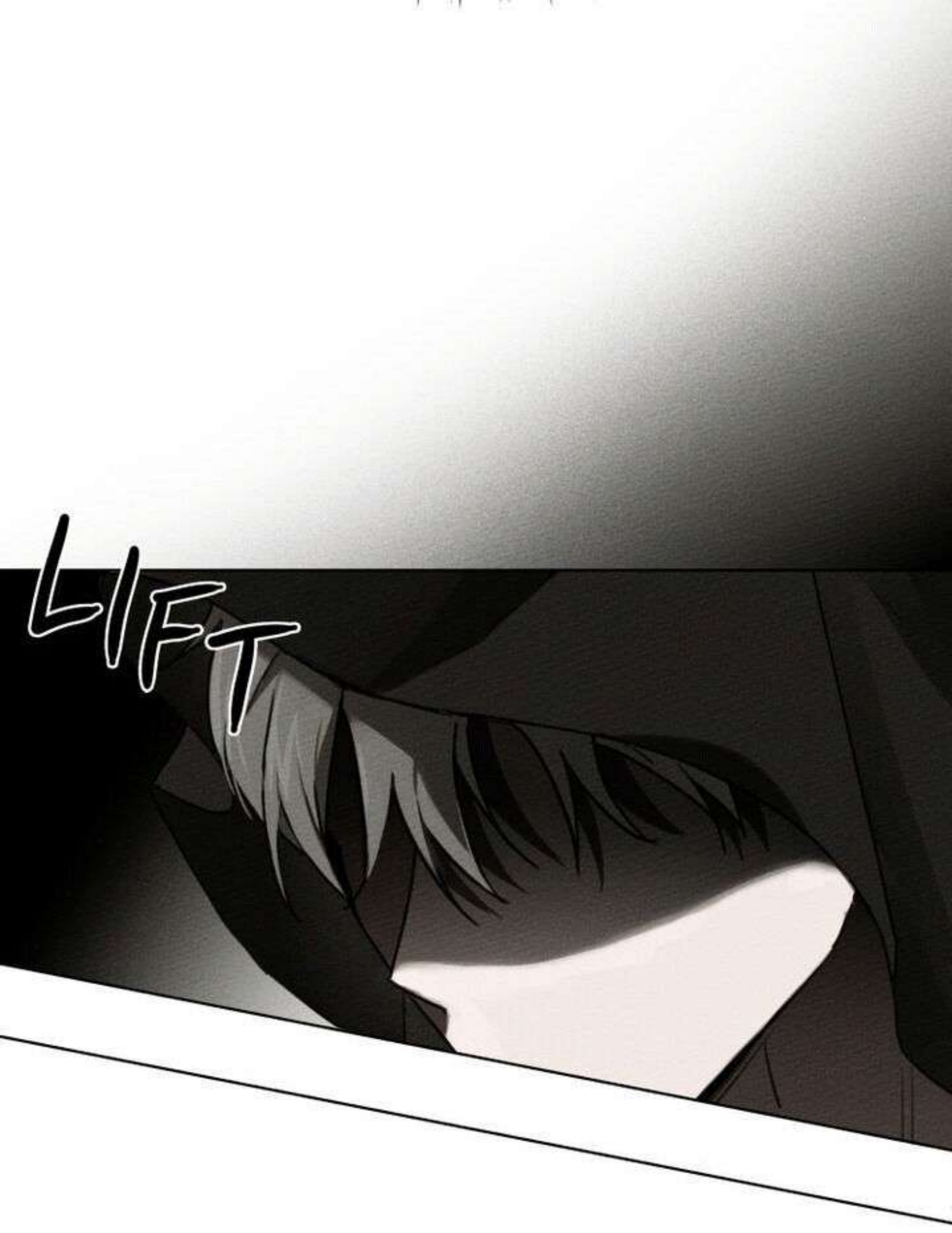

RISE..

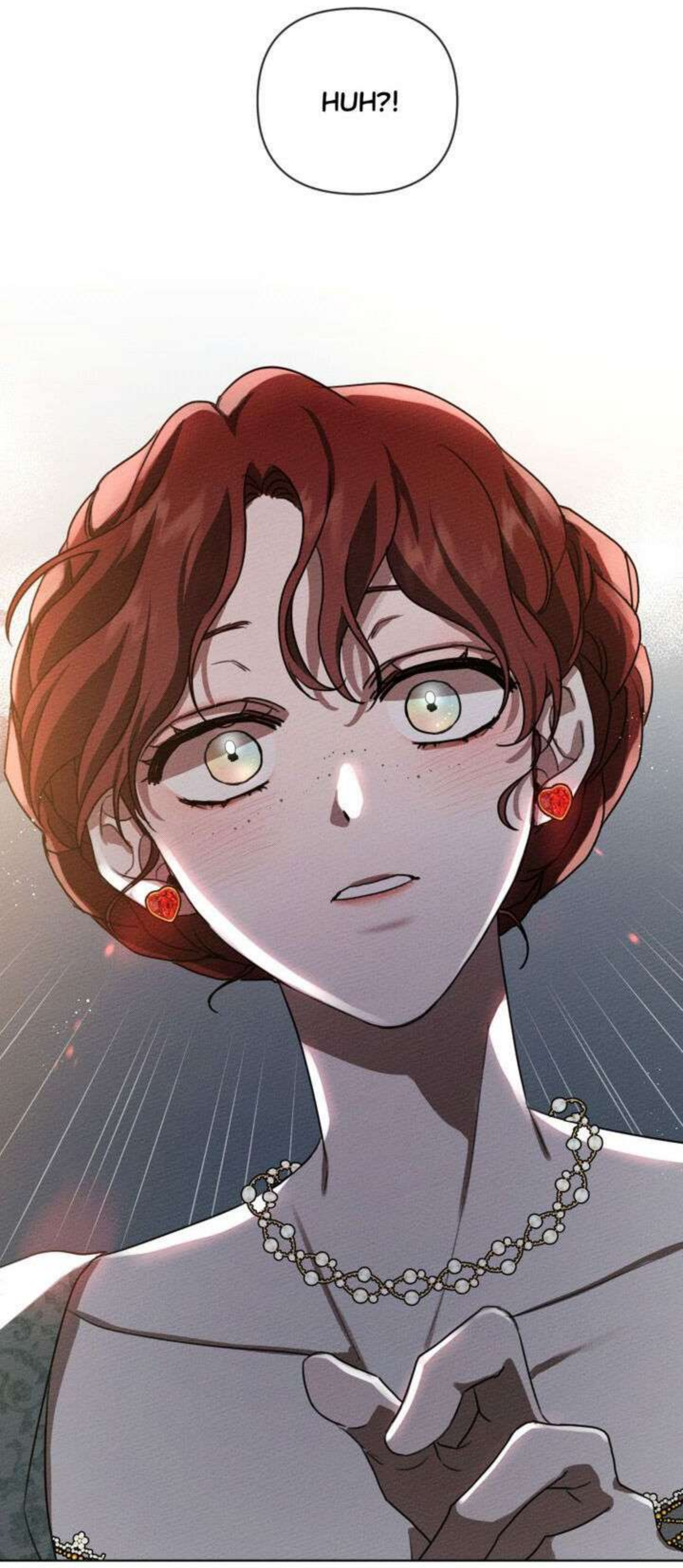

SLAM

!!!


WH-
WHAT...
JOLT


WHAT'S THAT NOISE?!


LIFT


HUH?!

SIGH...
WHY HAVE YOU BEEN SO NOISY THESE LAST FEW DAYS?

R-RUTH?!

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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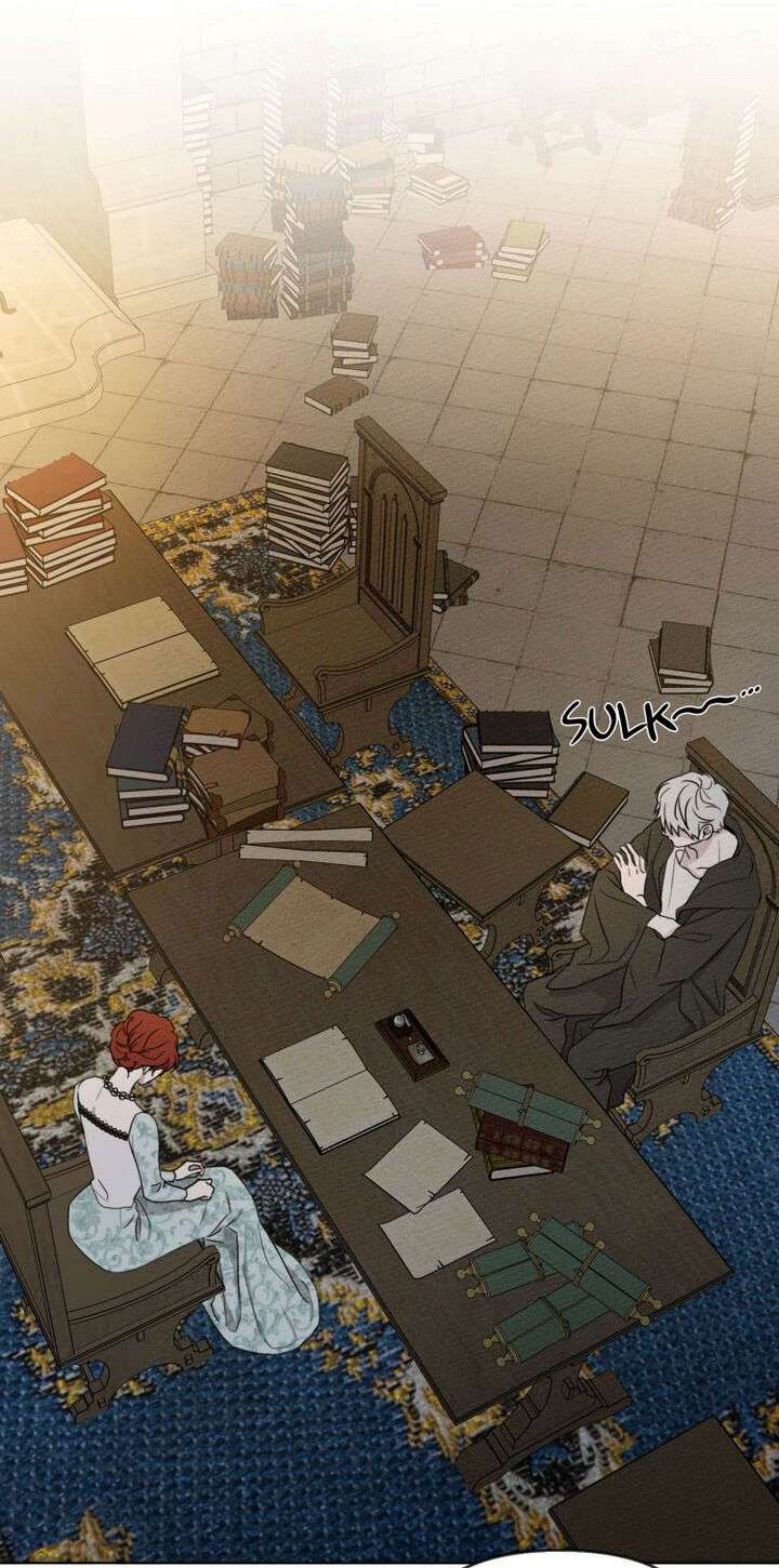
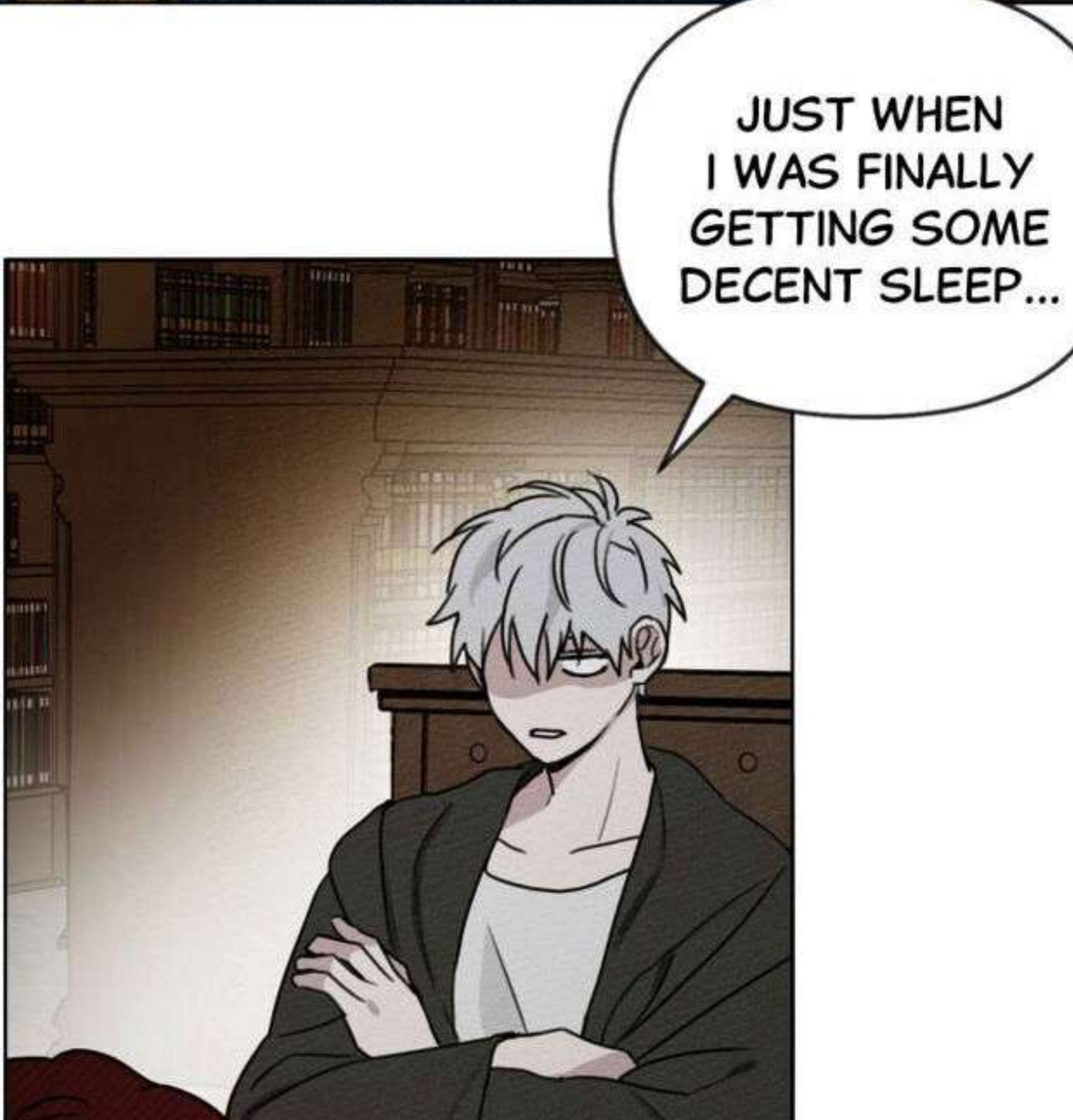
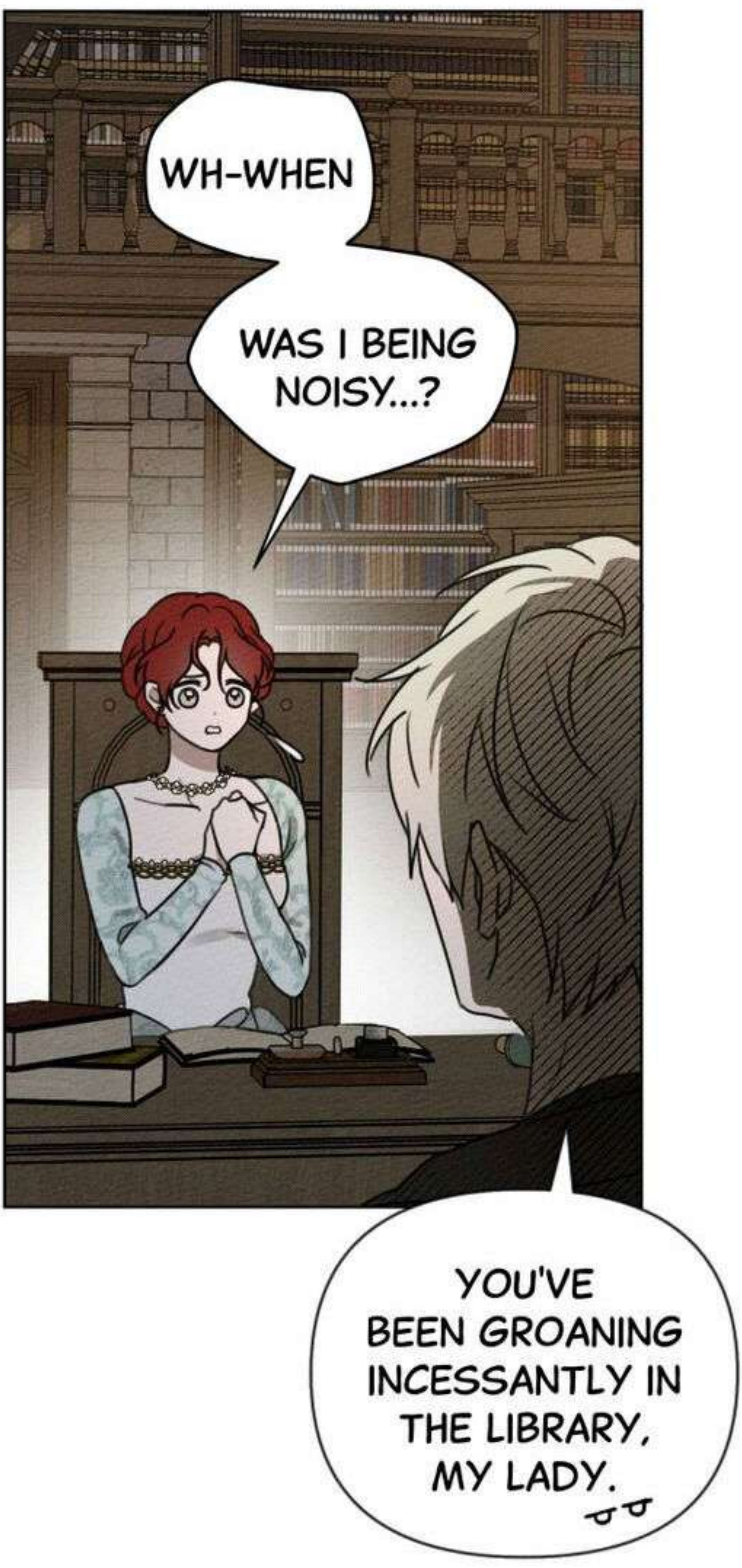
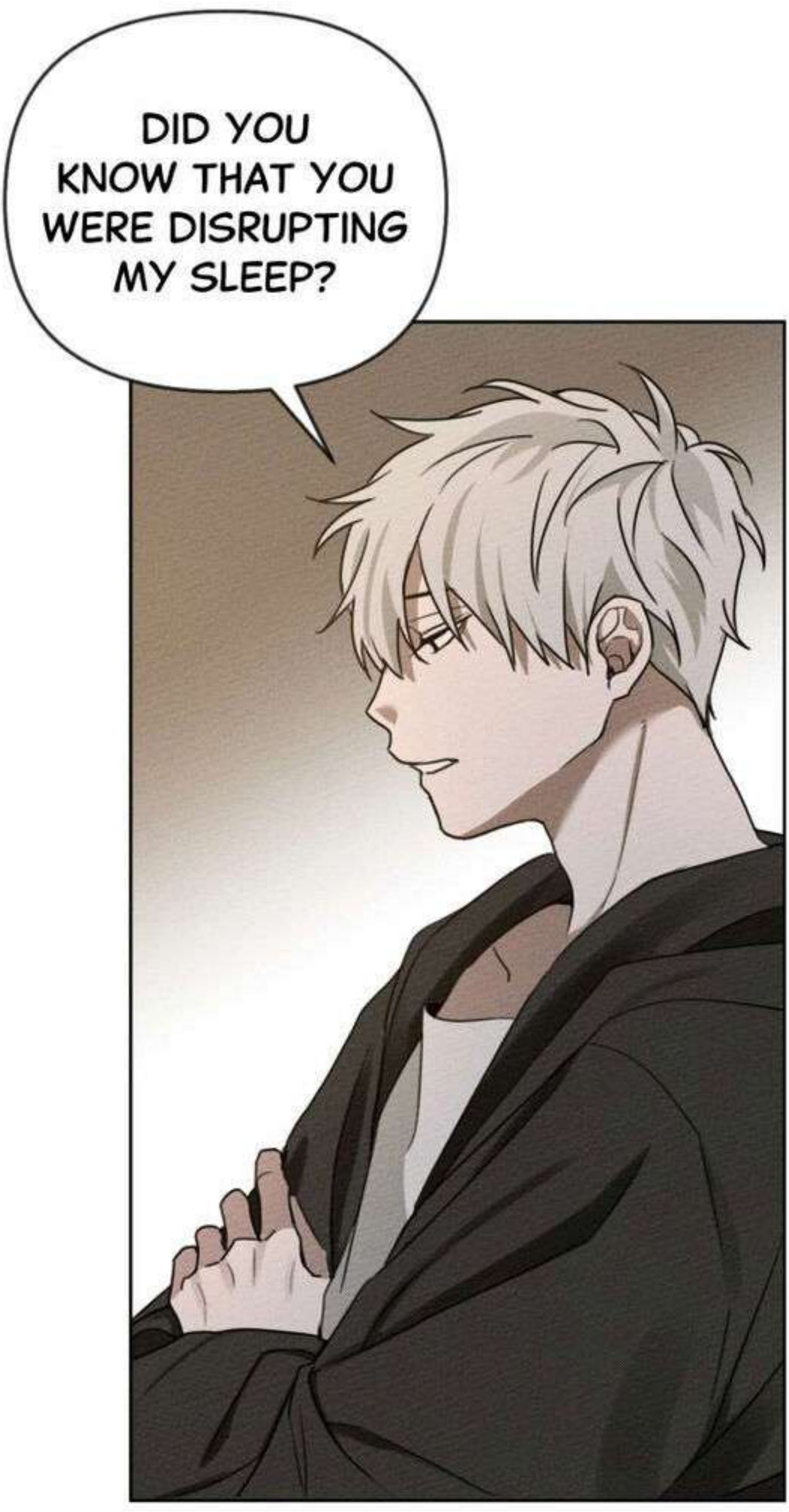
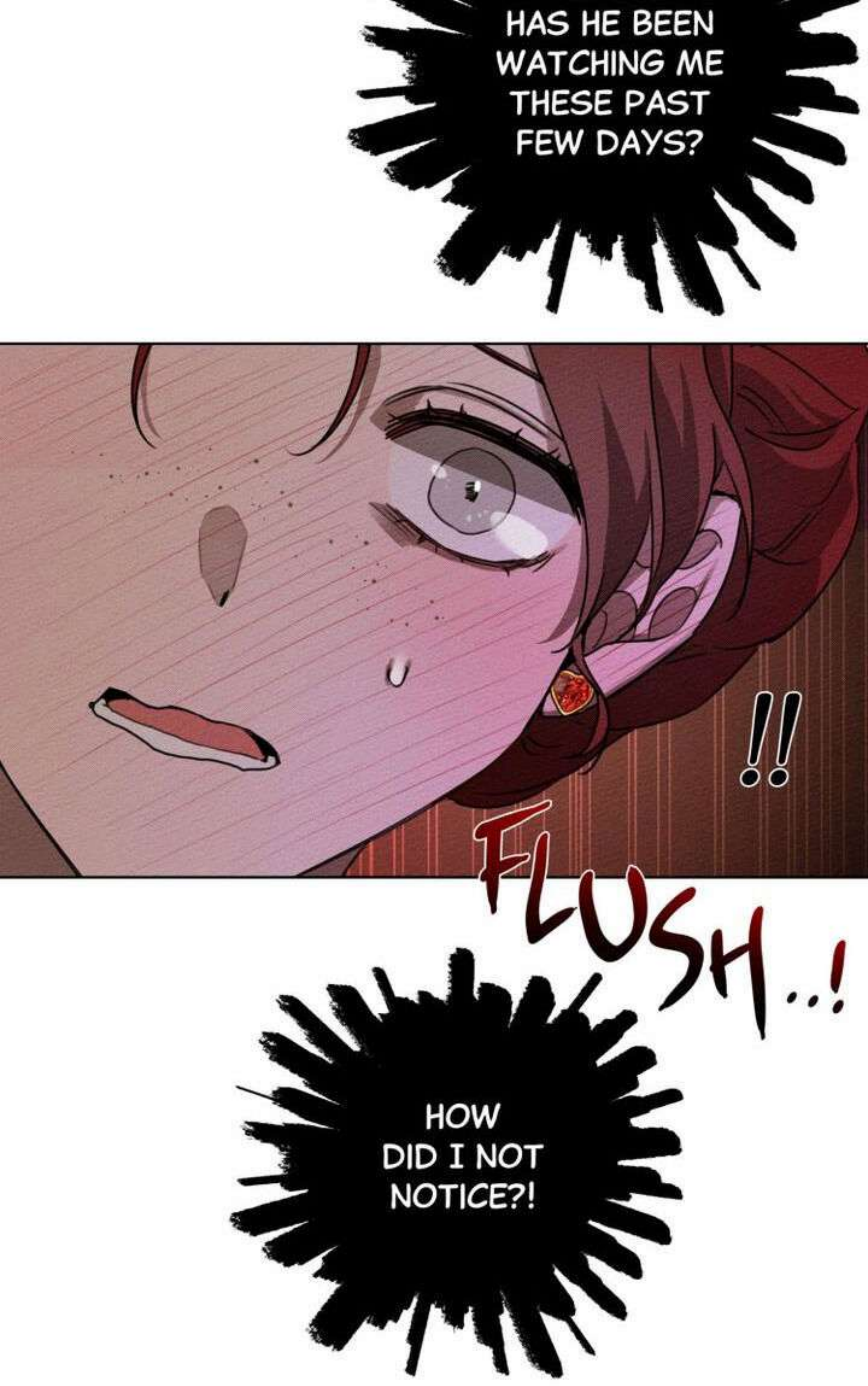

SULK~~...

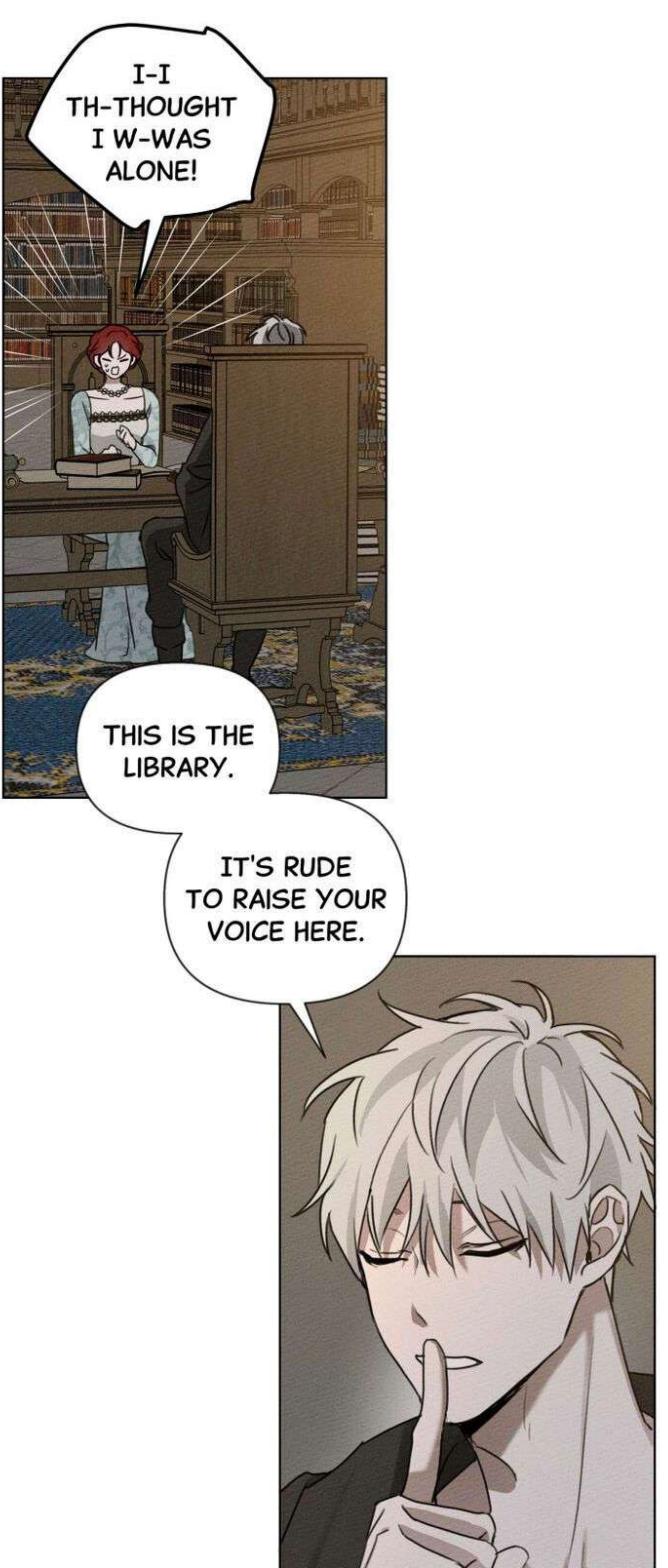

JUST WHEN I WAS FINALLY GETTING SOME DECENT SLEEP...
WHY HAVE YOU BEEN SO NOISY THESE DAYS?

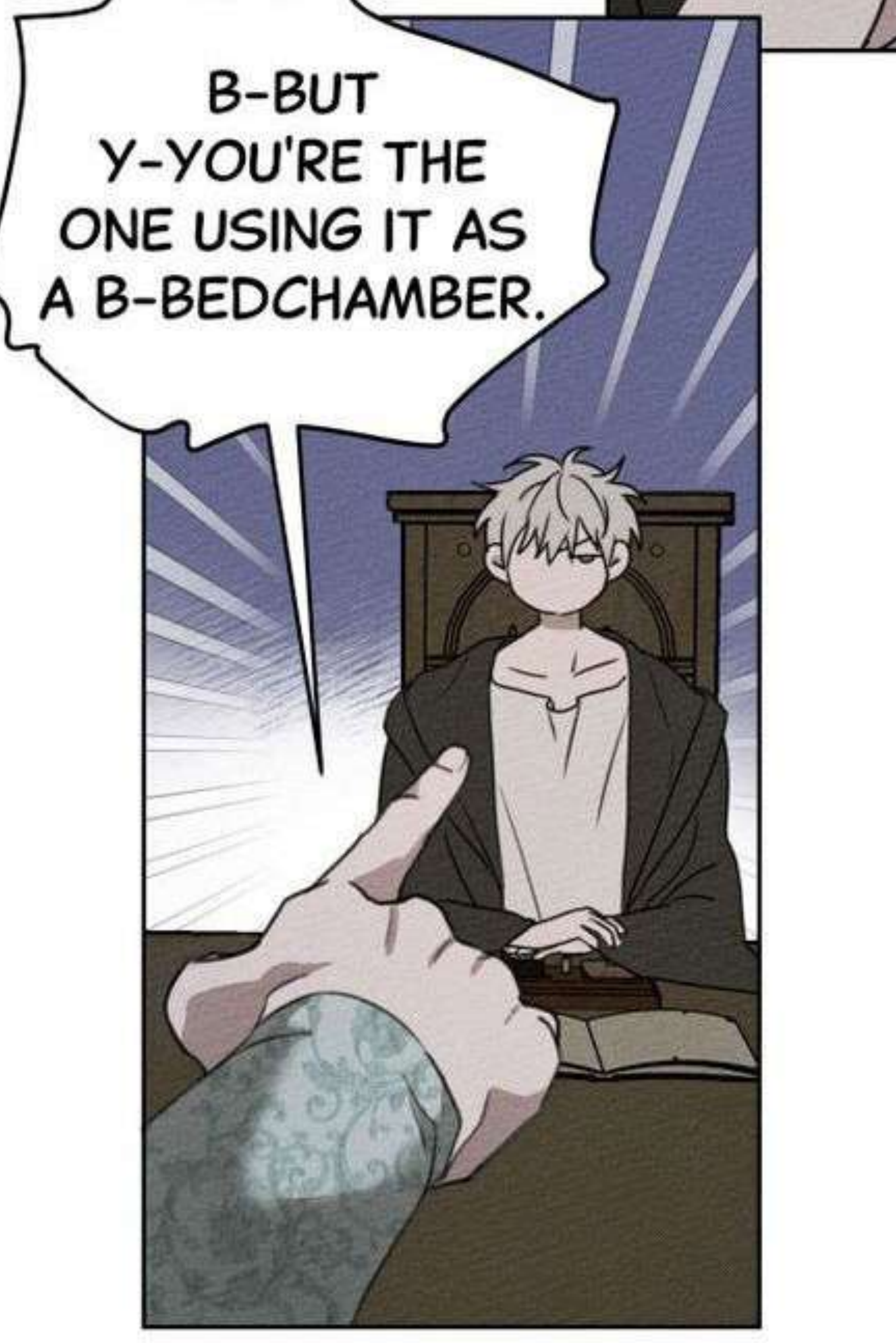

WH-WHEN
WAS I BEING NOISY...?
YOU'VE BEEN GROANING INCESSANTLY IN THE LIBRARY, MY LADY.

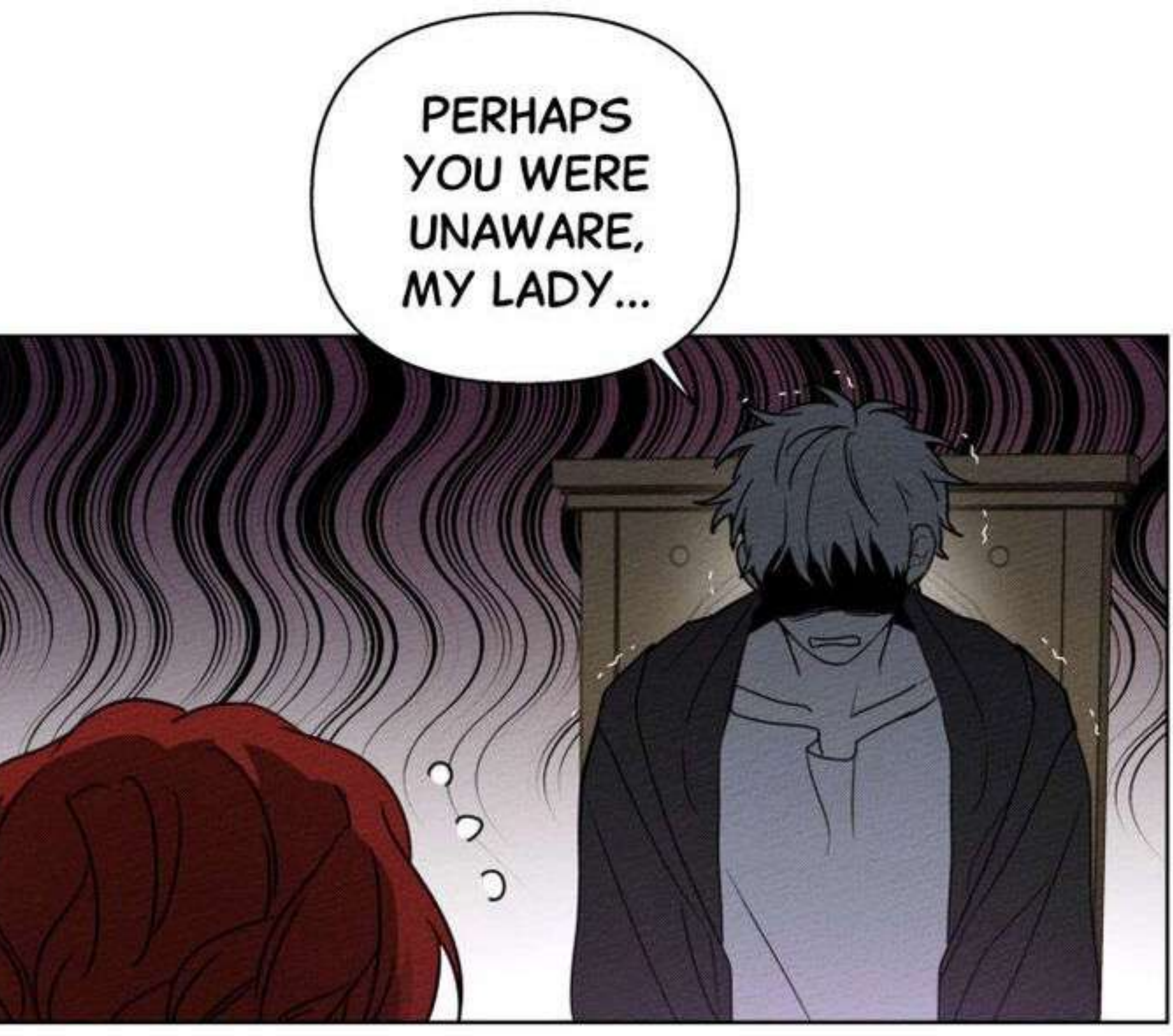

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU WERE DISRUPTING MY SLEEP?

WAIT,

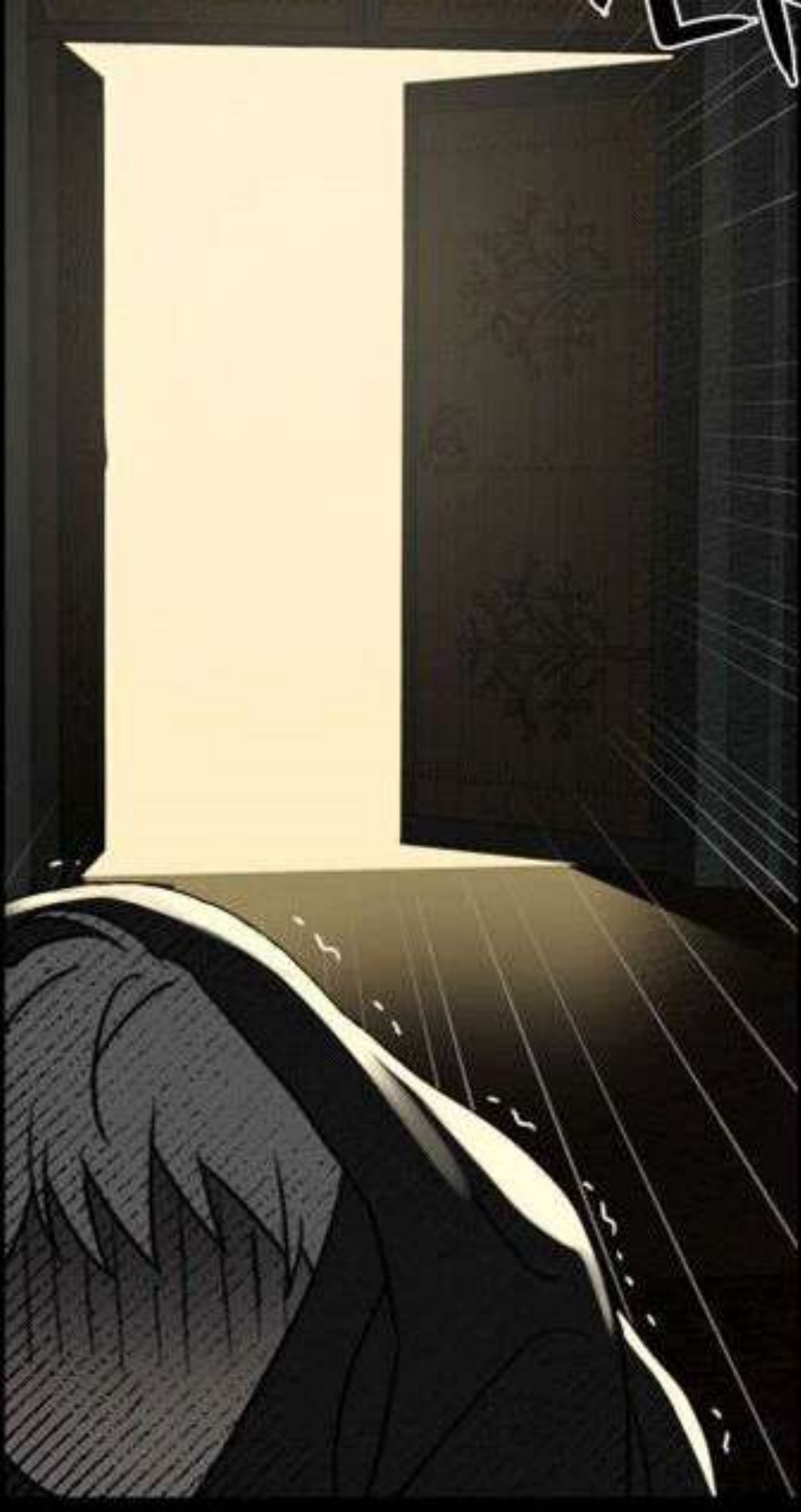

HAS HE BEEN WATCHING ME THESE PAST FEW DAYS?
!!
FLUSH..!
HOW DID I NOT NOTICE?!

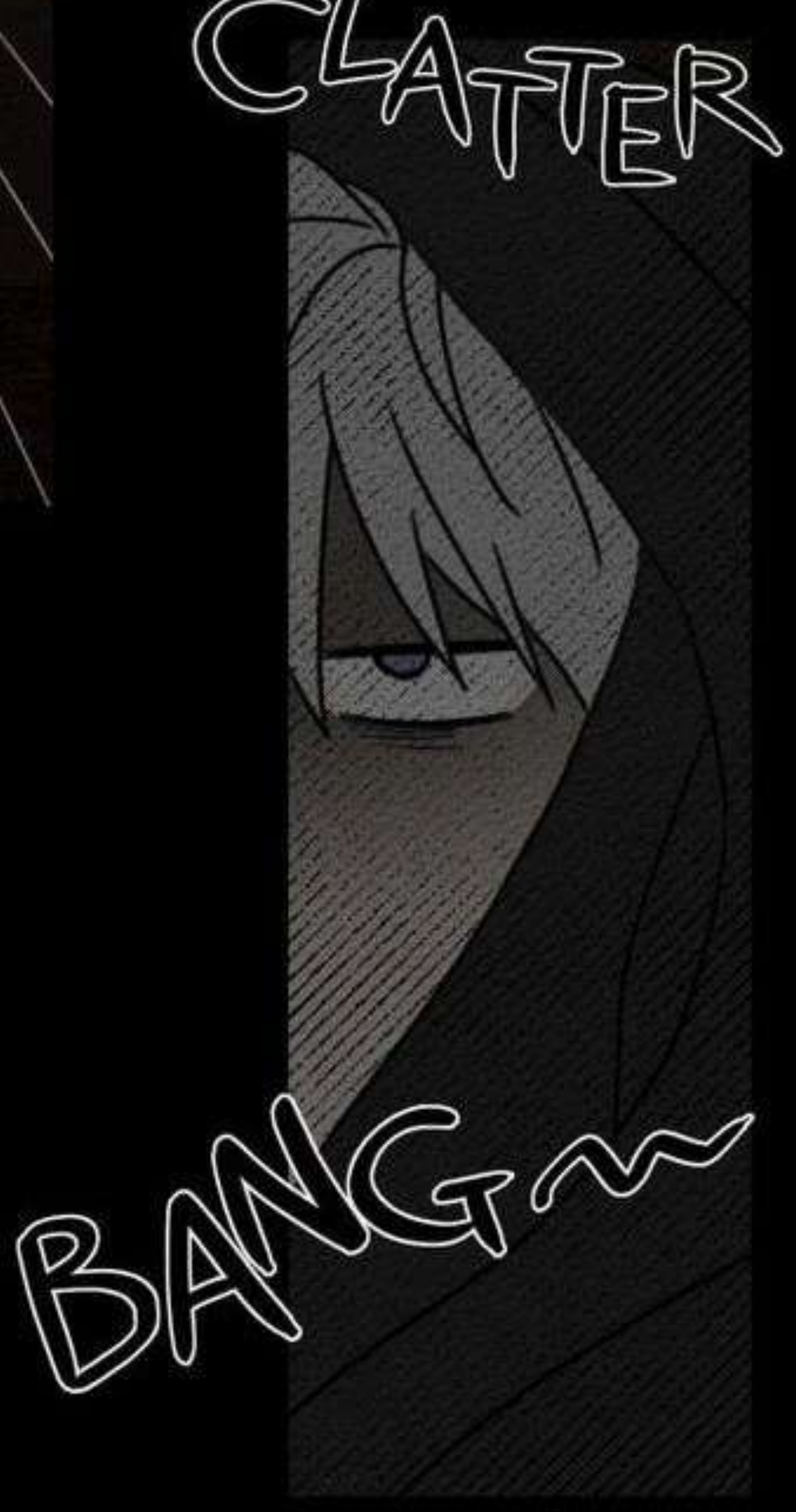

I-I TH-THOUGHT I W-WAS ALONE!
THIS IS THE LIBRARY.
IT'S RUDE TO RAISE YOUR VOICE HERE.

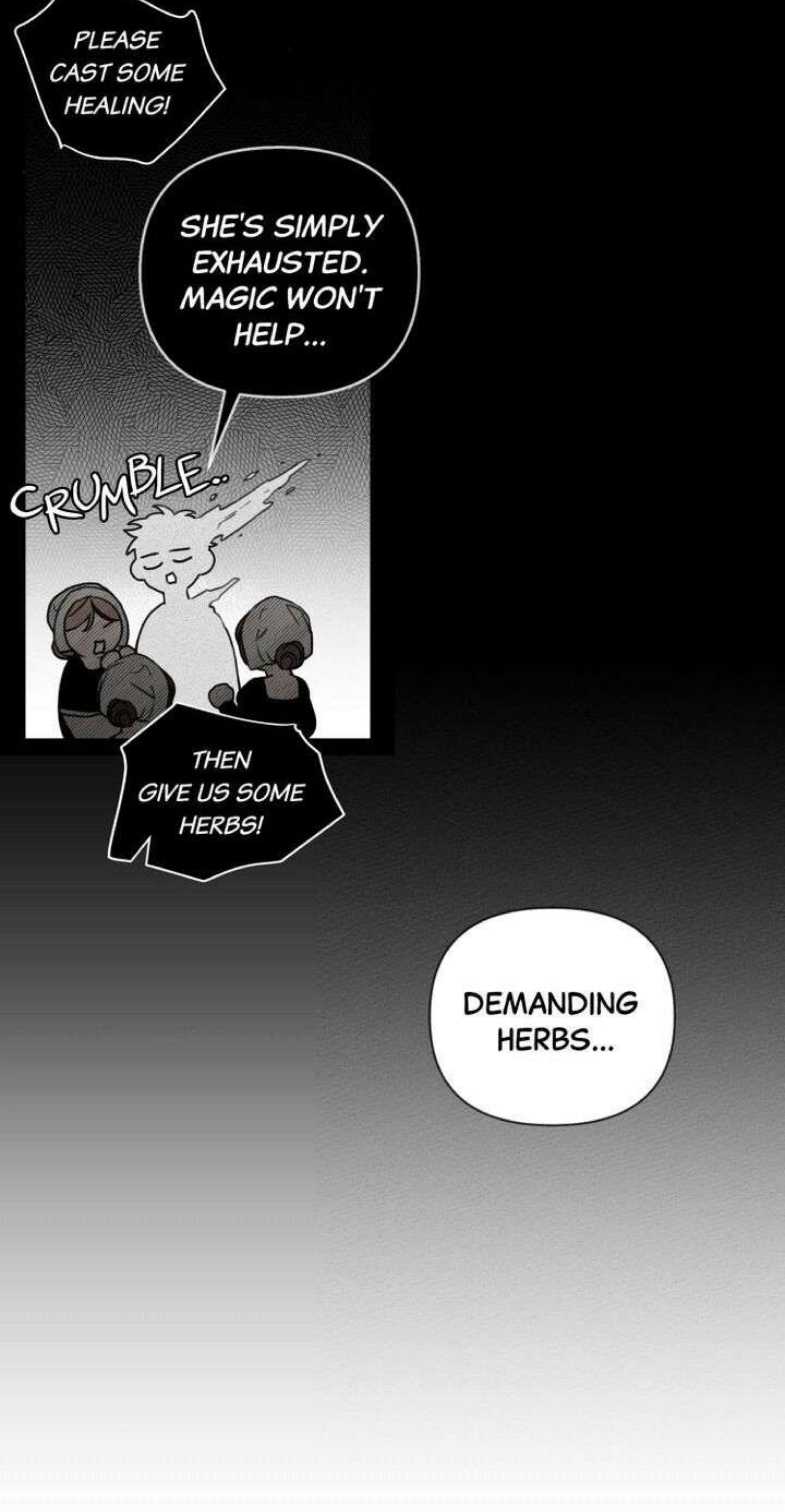

B-BUT Y-YOU'RE THE ONE USING IT AS A B-BEDCHAMBER.

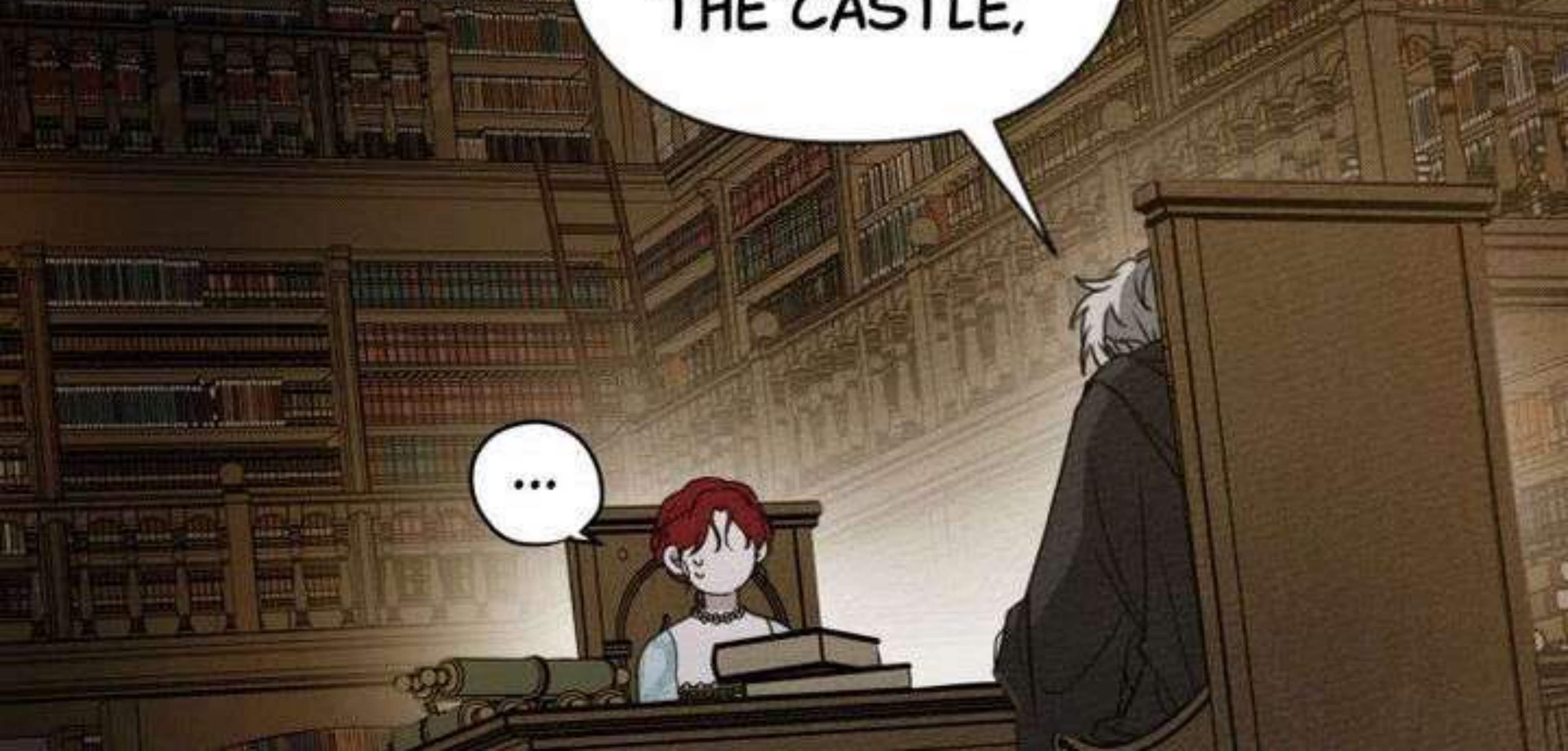

PERHAPS YOU WERE UNAWARE, MY LADY...

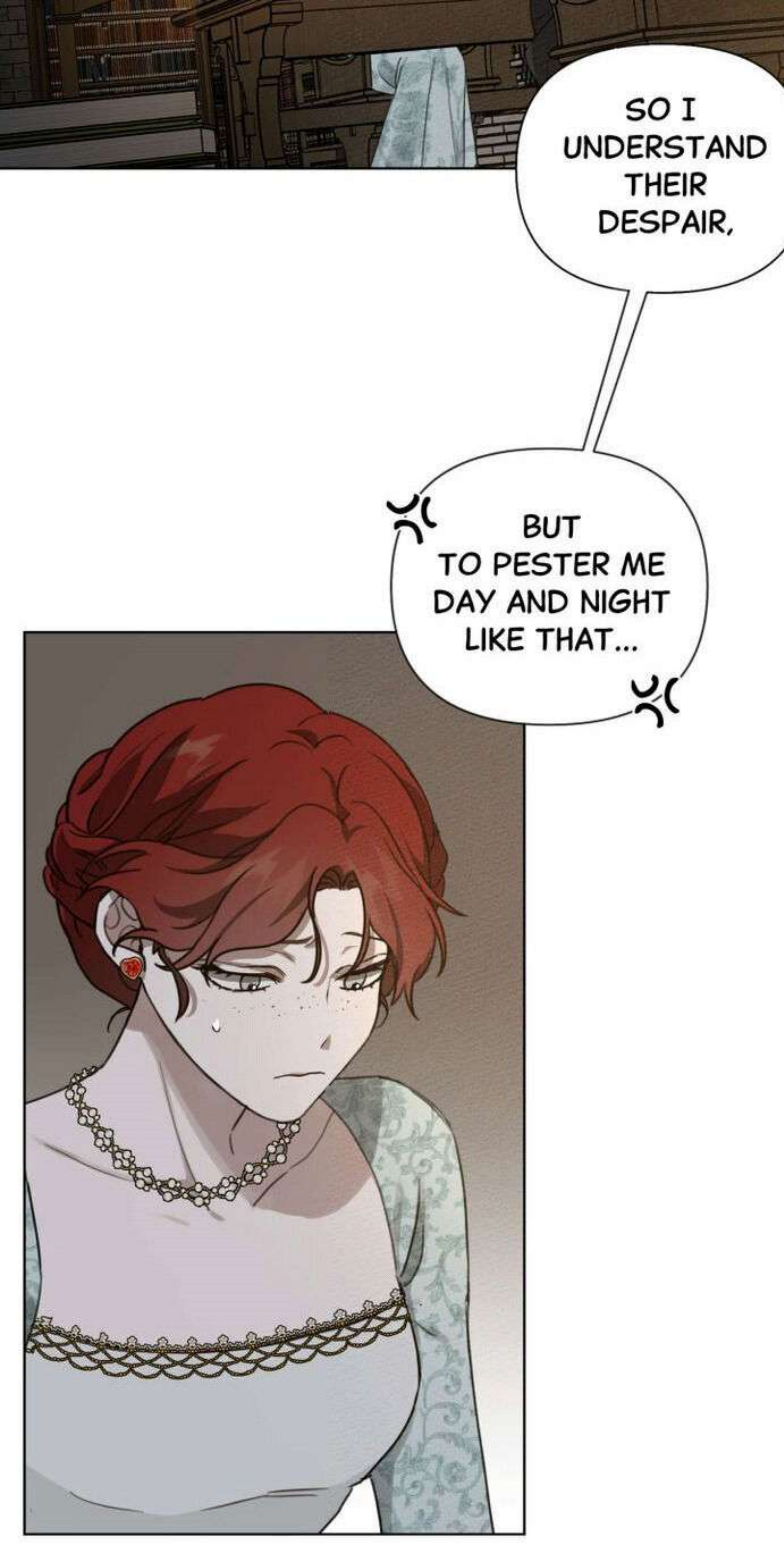
ASKING FOR HEALING MAGIC IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT,

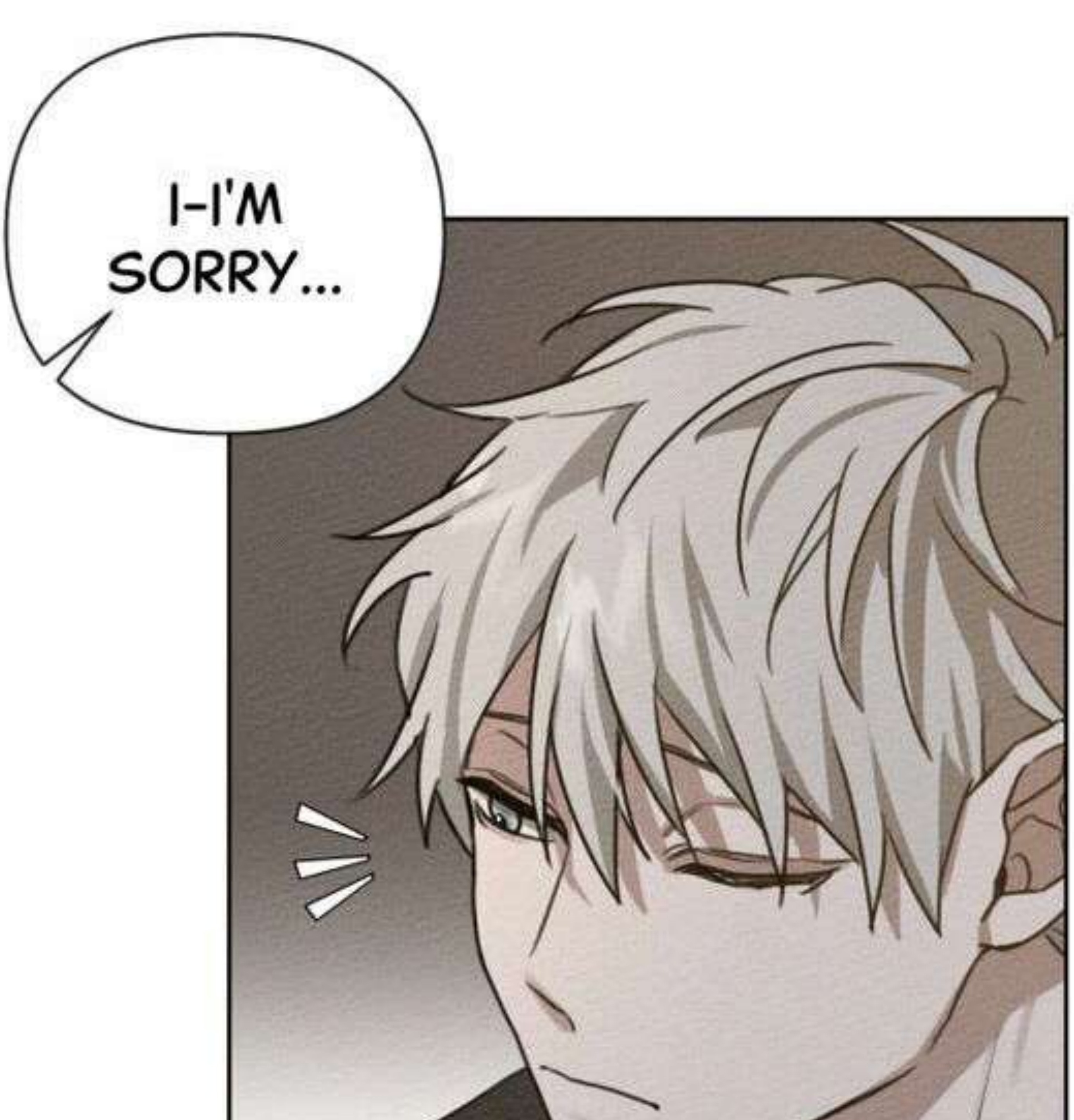


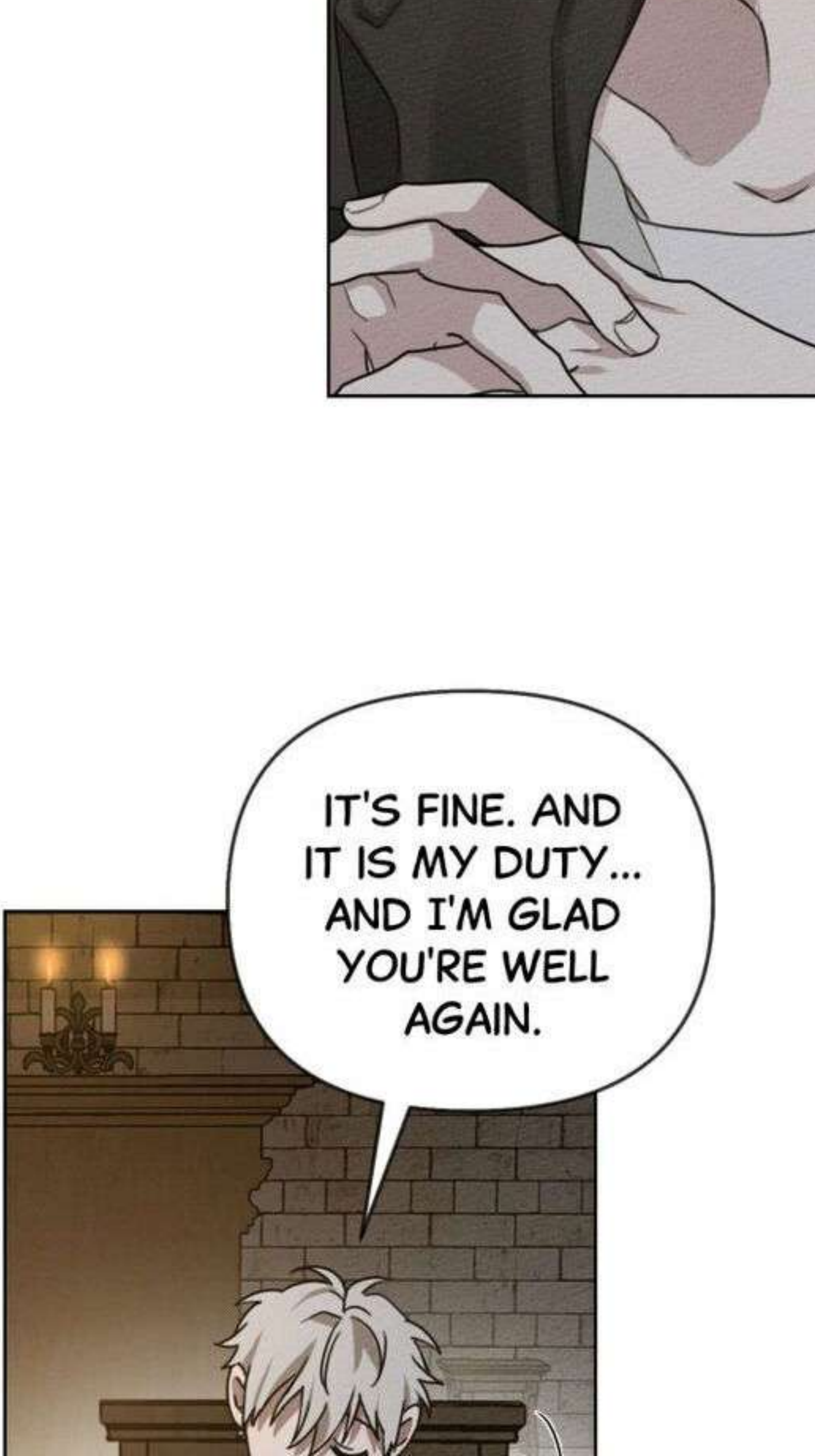

CLATTER
BANG~

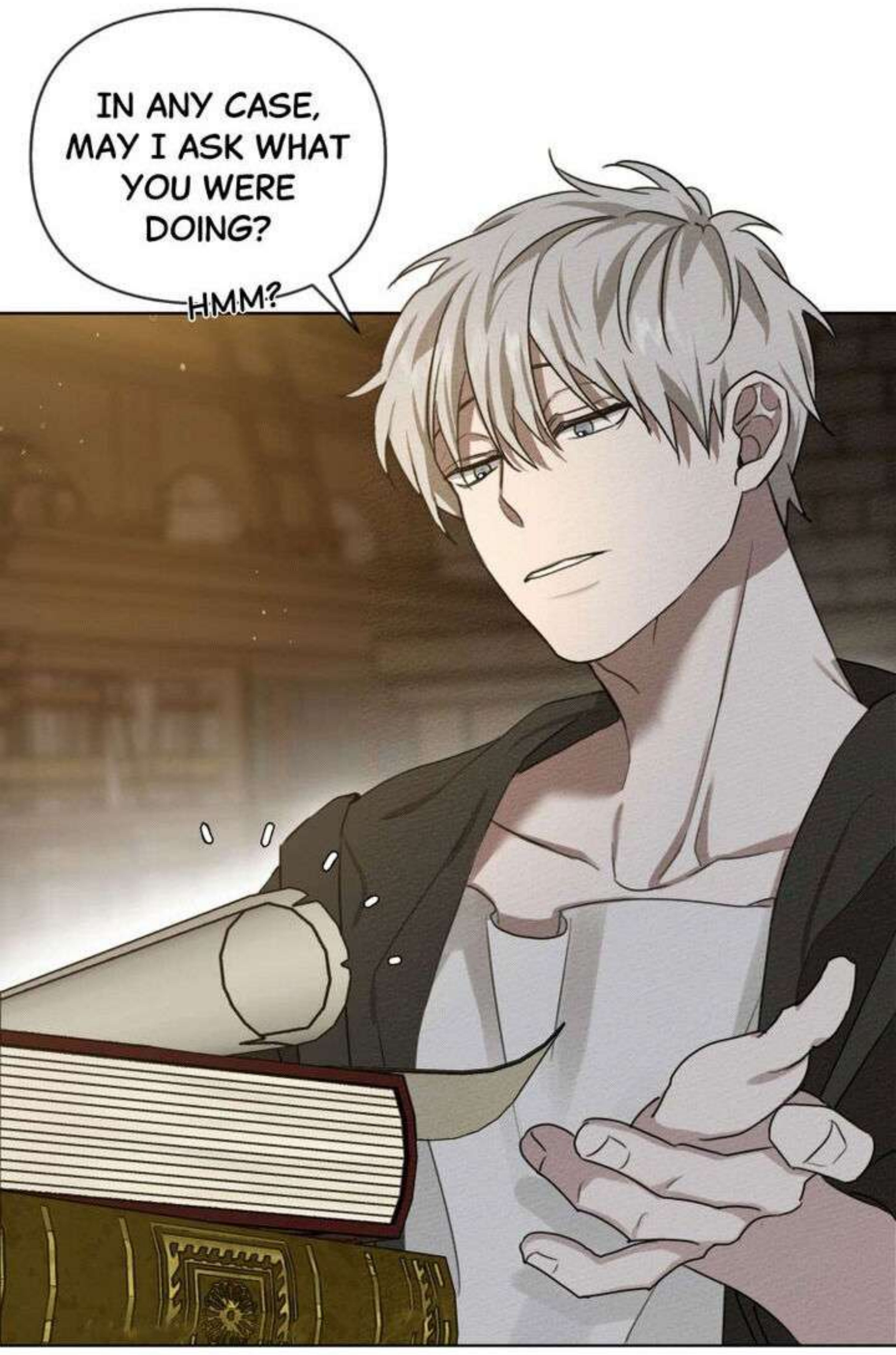

PLEASE CAST SOME HEALING!
SHE'S SIMPLY EXHAUSTED. MAGIC WON'T HELP...
CRUMBLE..
THEN GIVE US SOME HERBS!
DEMANDING HERBS...

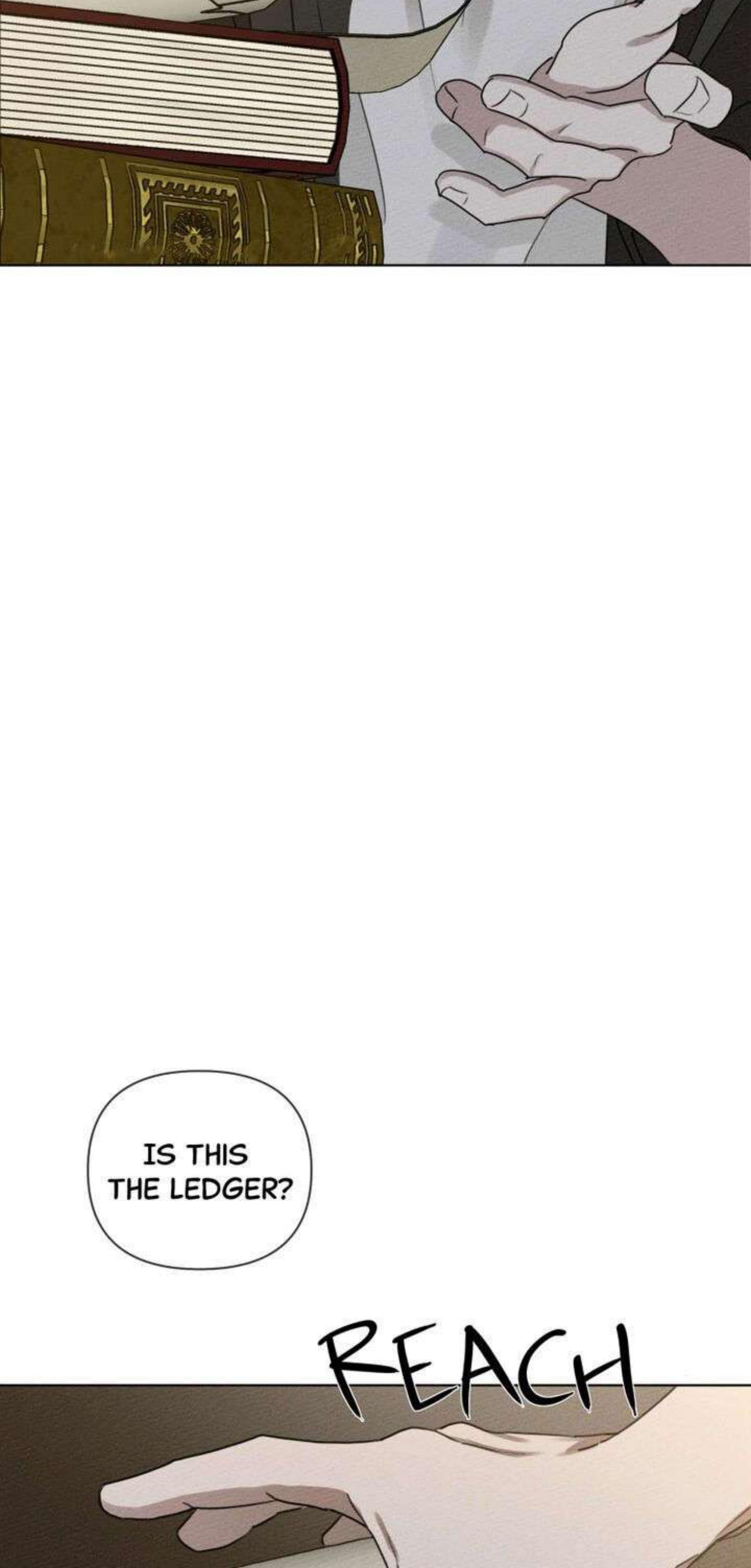

I KNOW I'M THE ONLY SORCERER IN THE CASTLE,
...

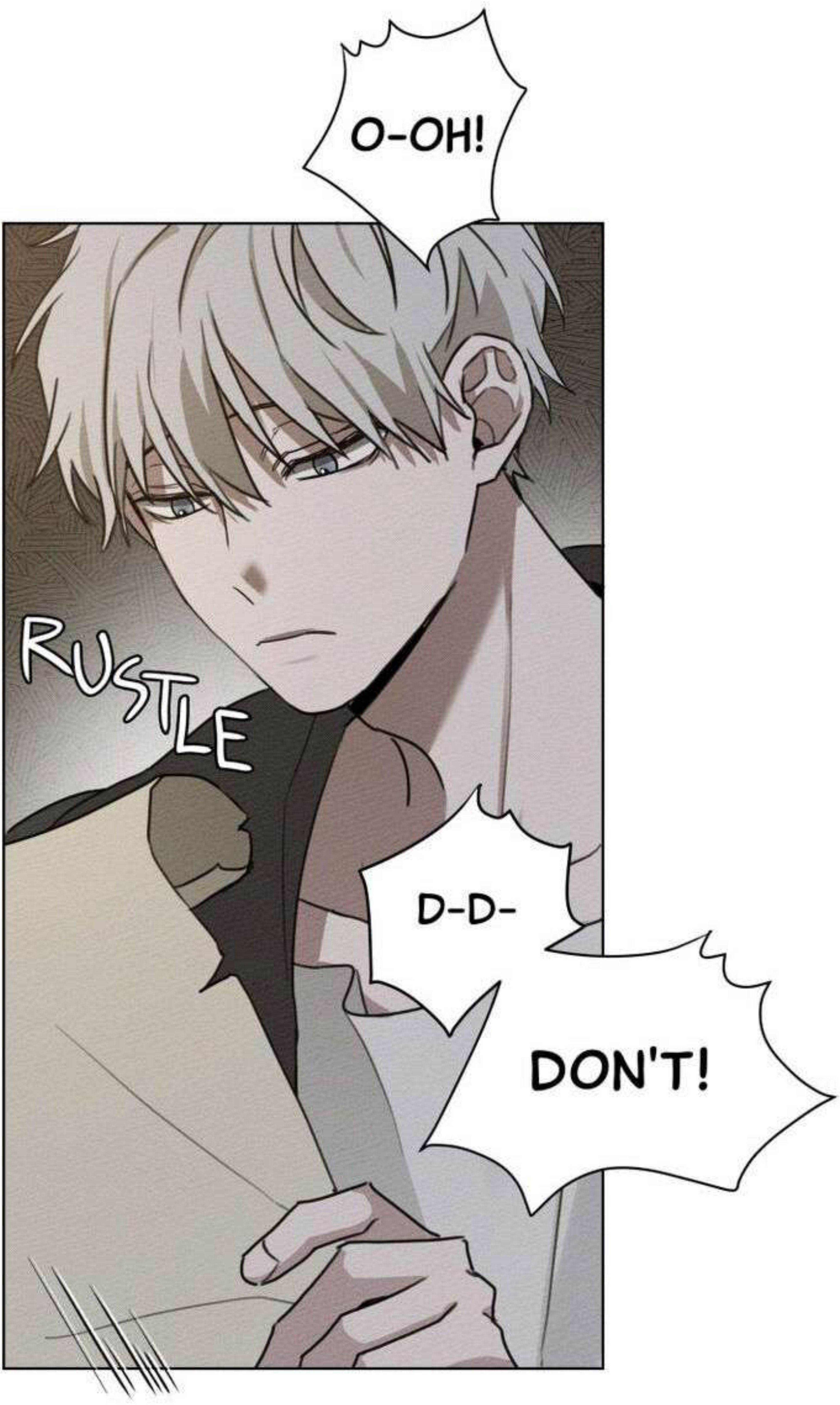

SO I UNDERSTAND THEIR DESPAIR,
BUT TO PESTER ME DAY AND NIGHT LIKE THAT...

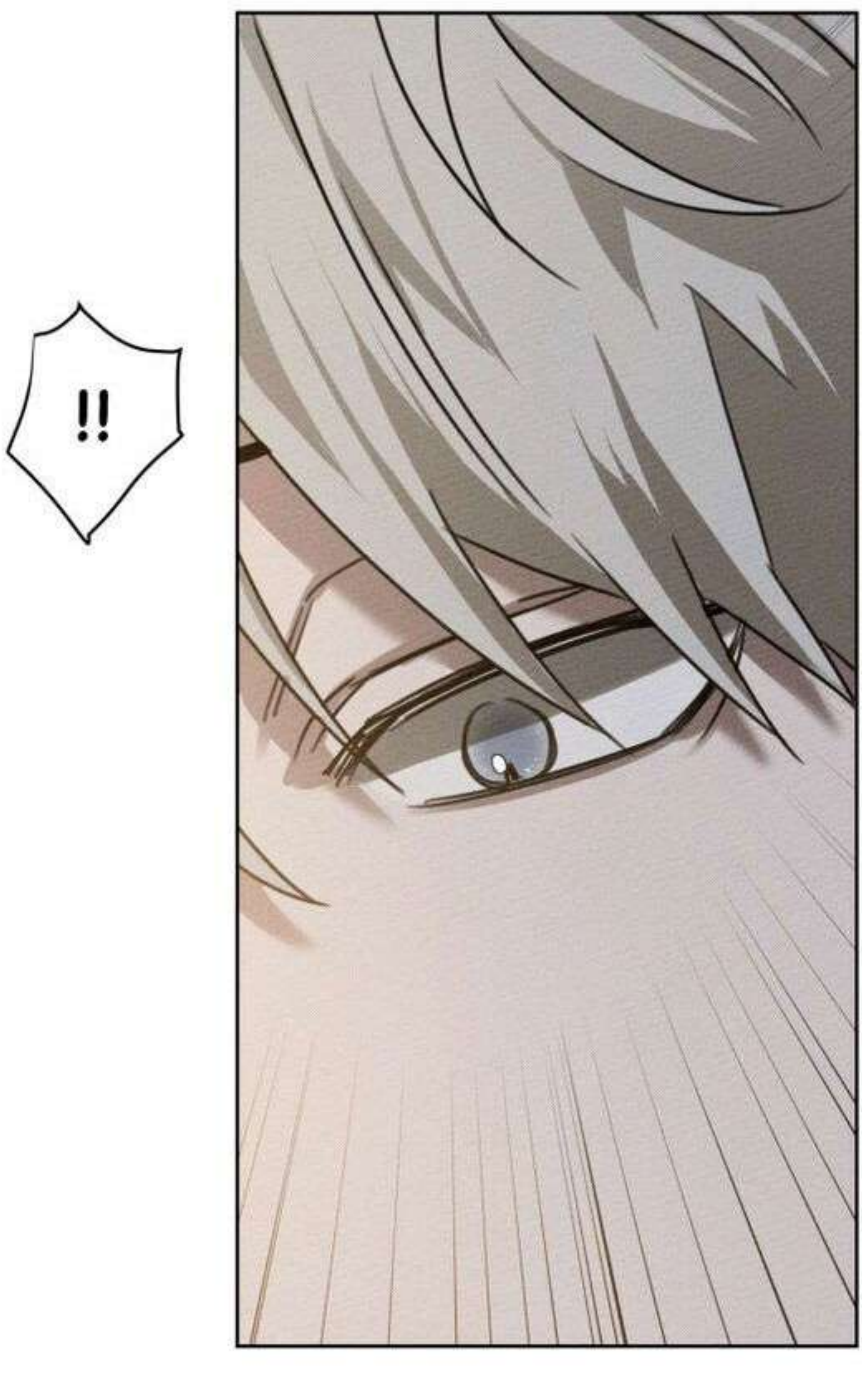

I-I'M SORRY...

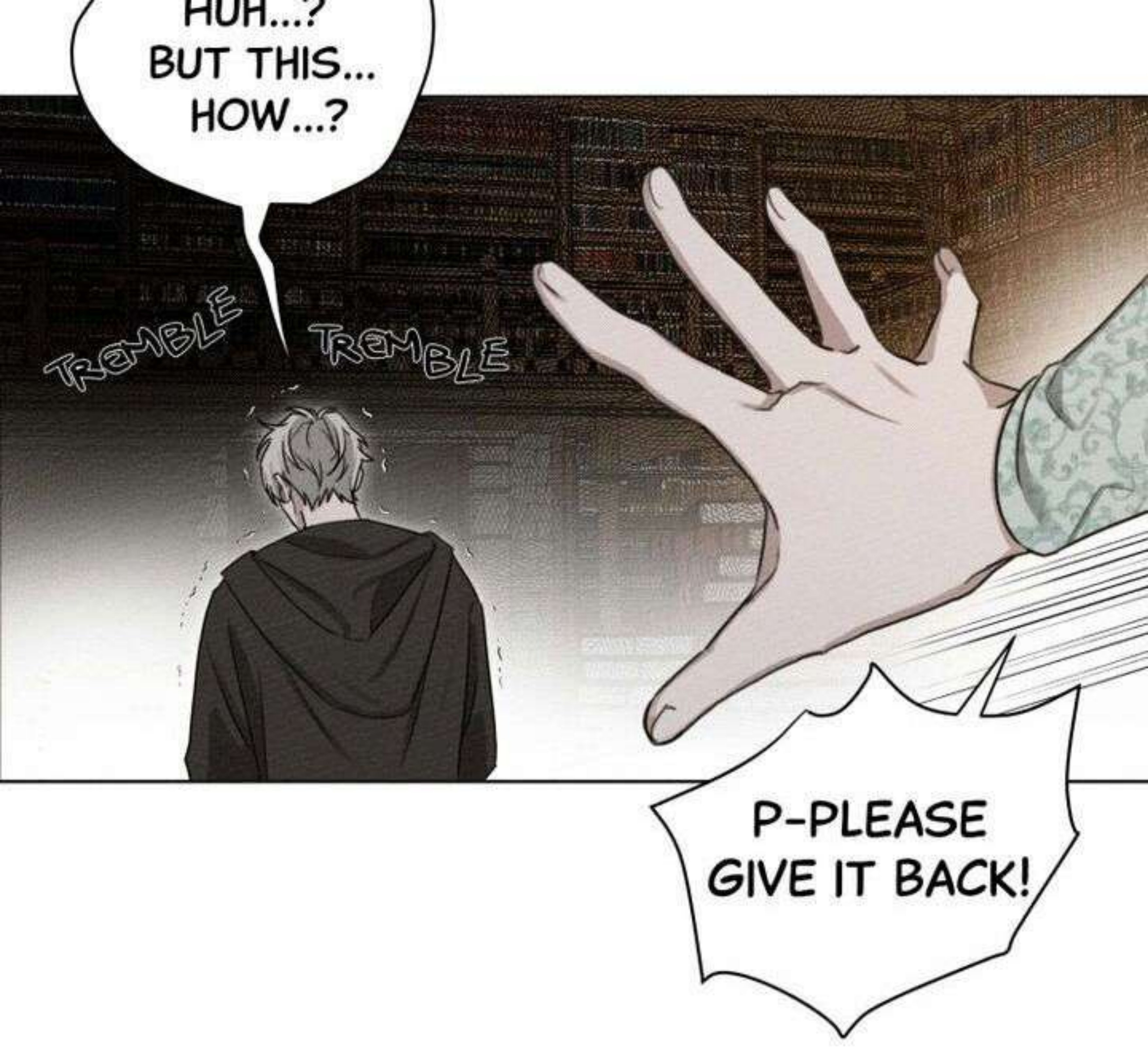

IT'S FINE. AND IT IS MY DUTY... AND I'M GLAD YOU'RE WELL AGAIN.

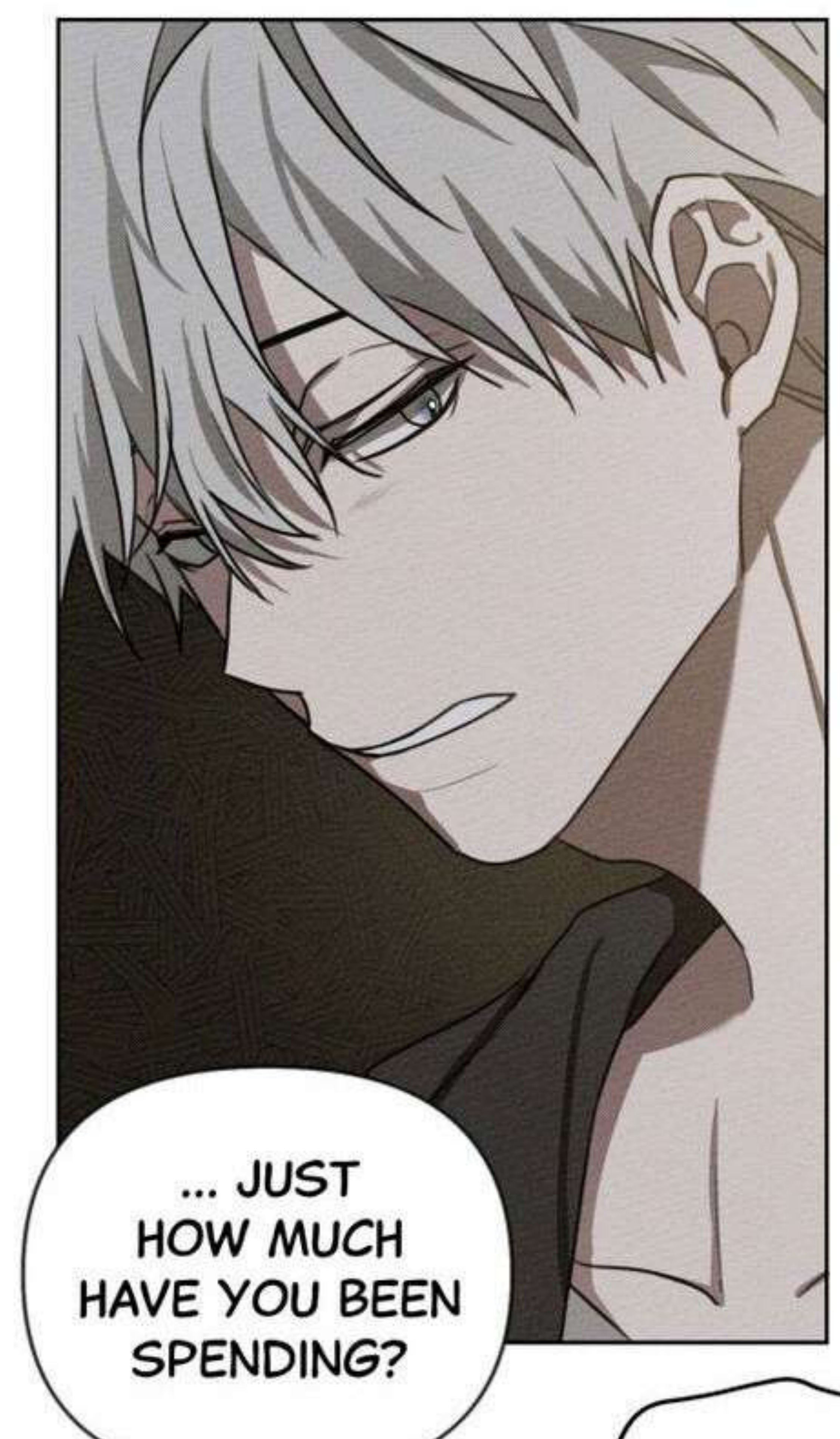

IN ANY CASE, MAY I ASK WHAT YOU WERE DOING?
HMM?

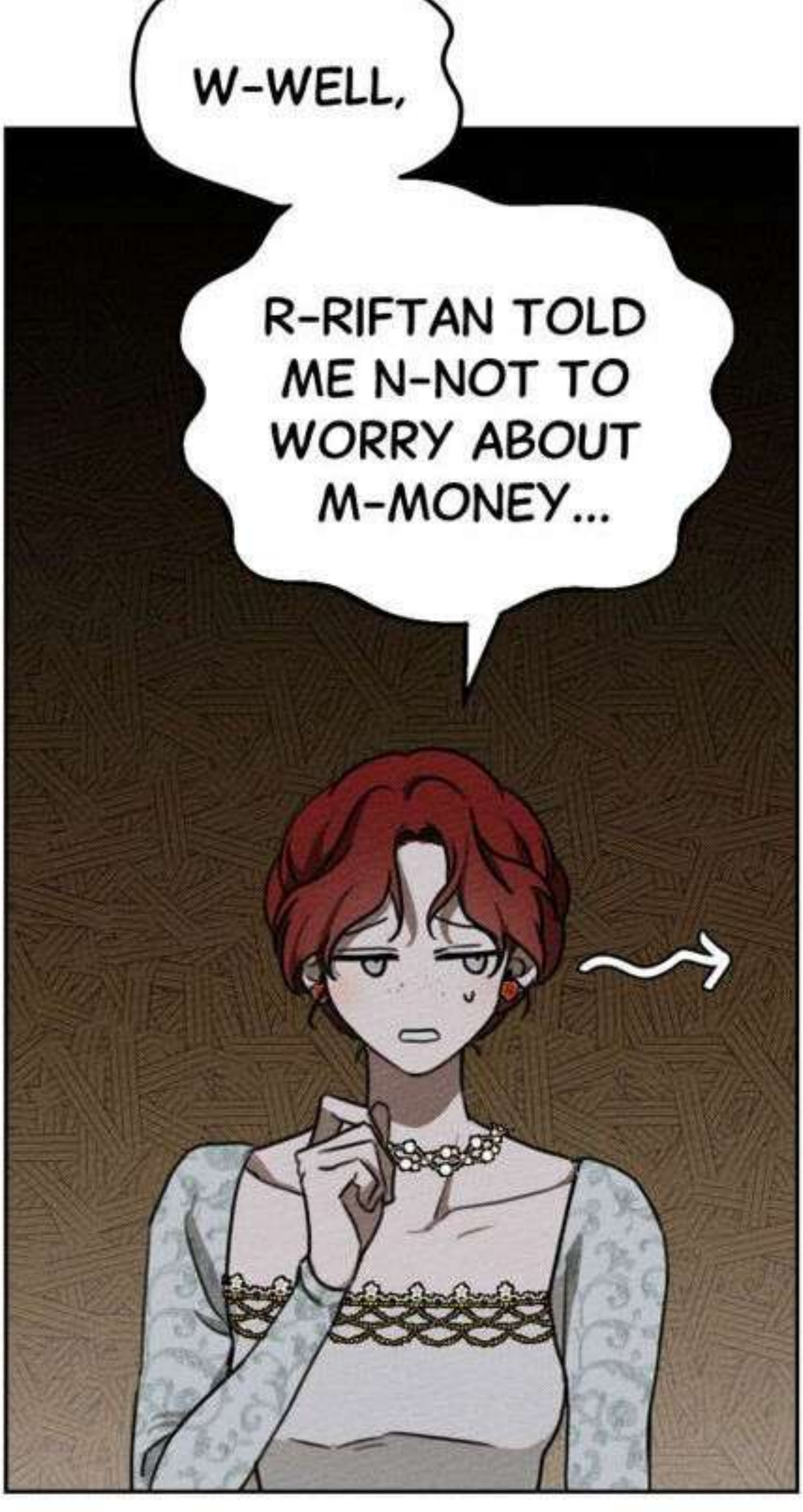

IS THIS THE LEDGER?
REACH

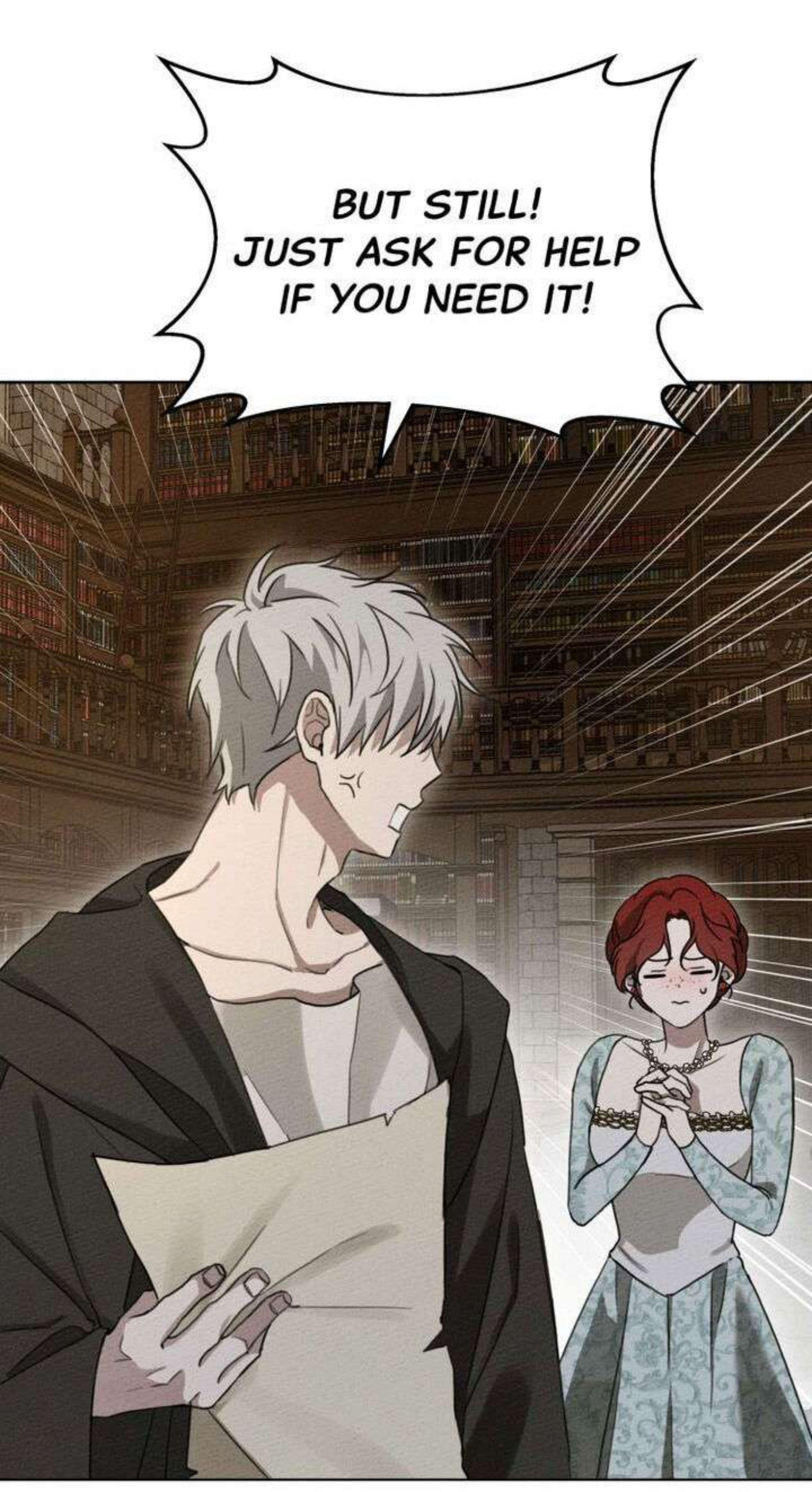

O-OH!
RUSTLE
D-D-
DON'T!


!!


HUH...?
BUT THIS...
HOW...?
TREMBLE TREMBLE
P-PLEASE GIVE IT BACK!

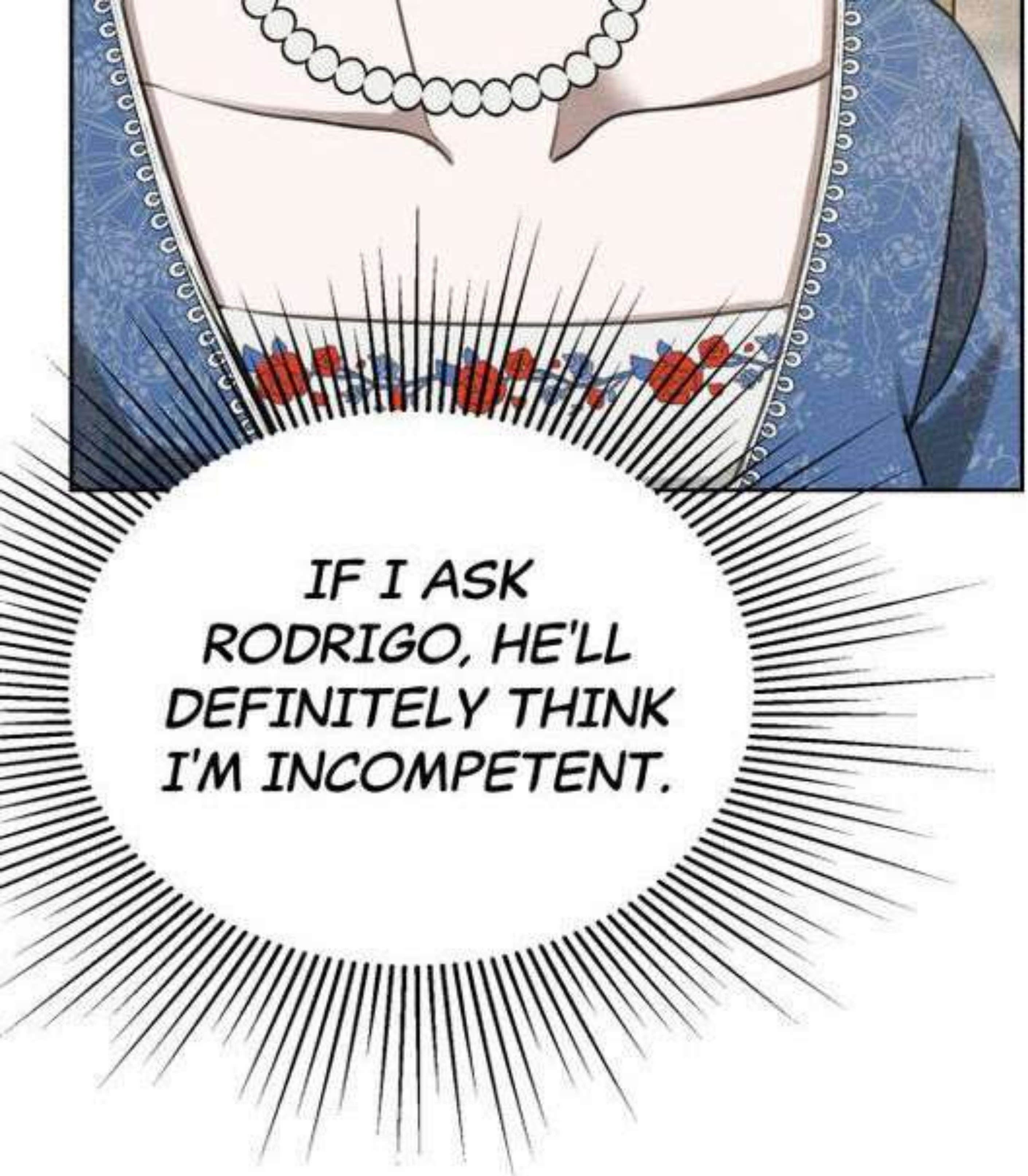

... JUST HOW MUCH HAVE YOU BEEN SPENDING?

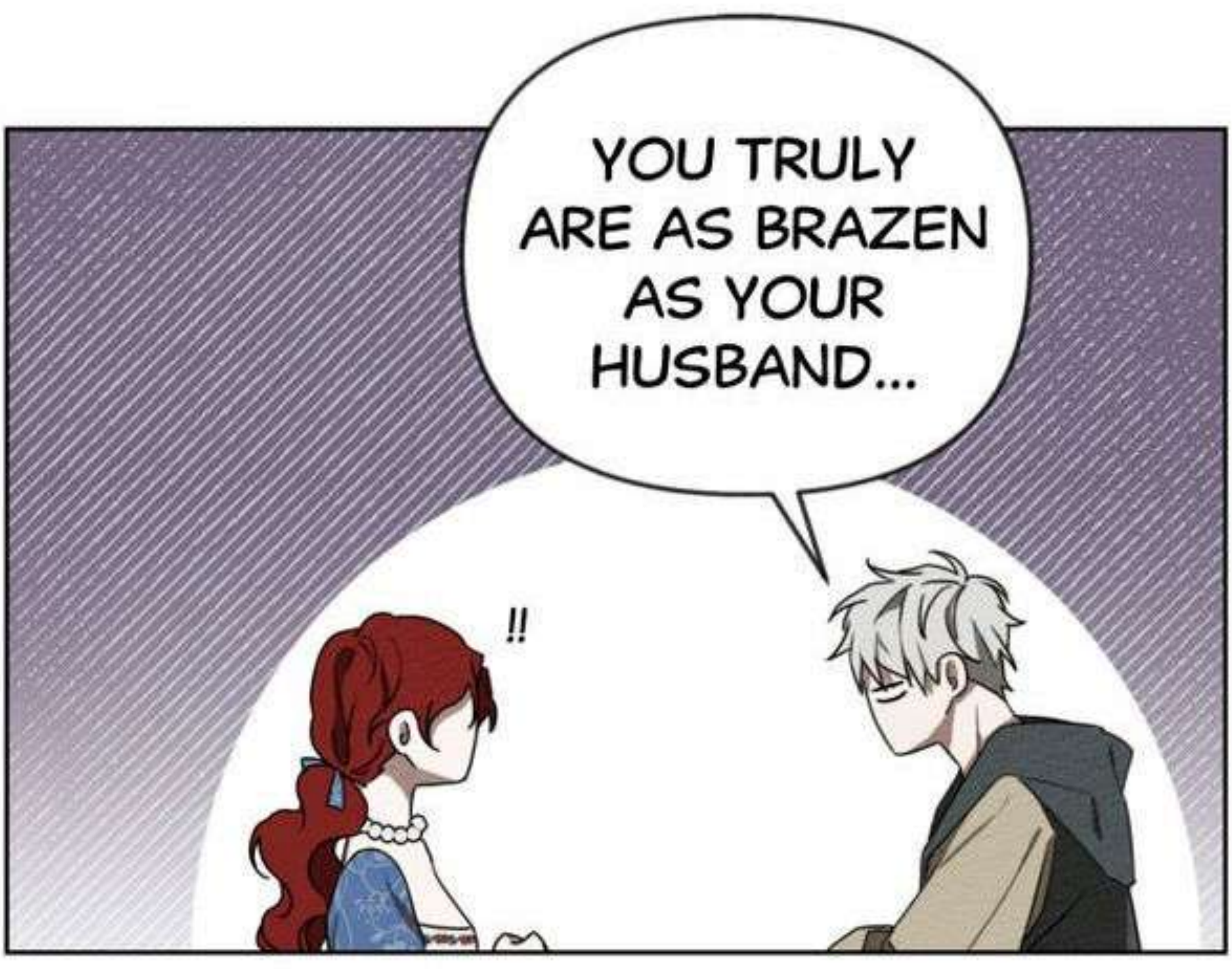

W-WELL,
R-RIFTAN TOLD ME N-NOT TO WORRY ABOUT M-MONEY...

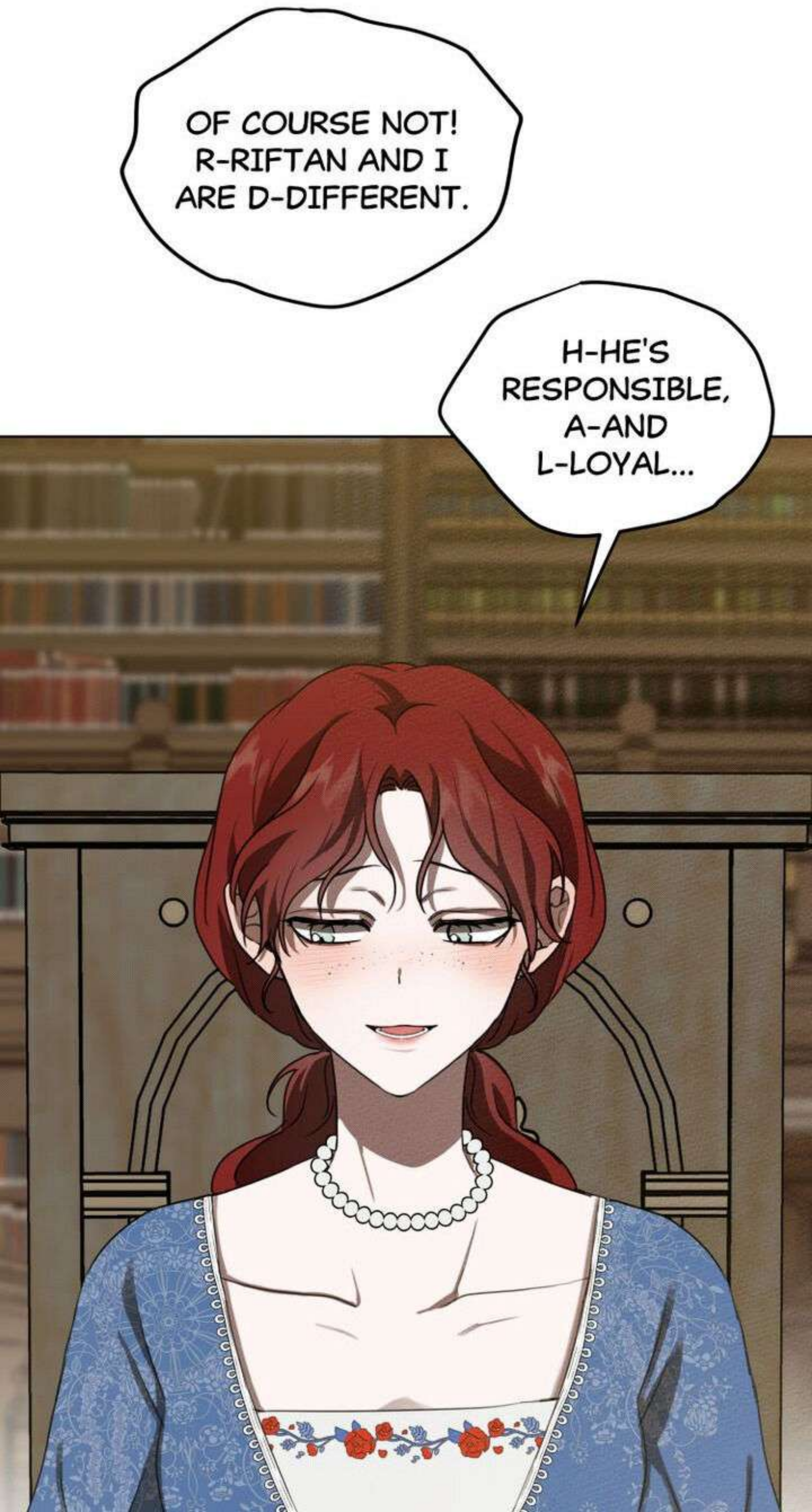

BUT STILL! JUST ASK FOR HELP IF YOU NEED IT!

THAT'S HOW MY PRIVATE LESSONS WITH RUTH BEGAN.

TAP TAP
WHAT I MEANT WAS FOR YOU TO ASK SOMEONE LIKE RODRIGO FOR HELP.
B-BUT YOU AGREED T-TO HELP M-ME.


IF I ASK RODRIGO, HE'LL DEFINITELY THINK I'M INCOMPETENT.

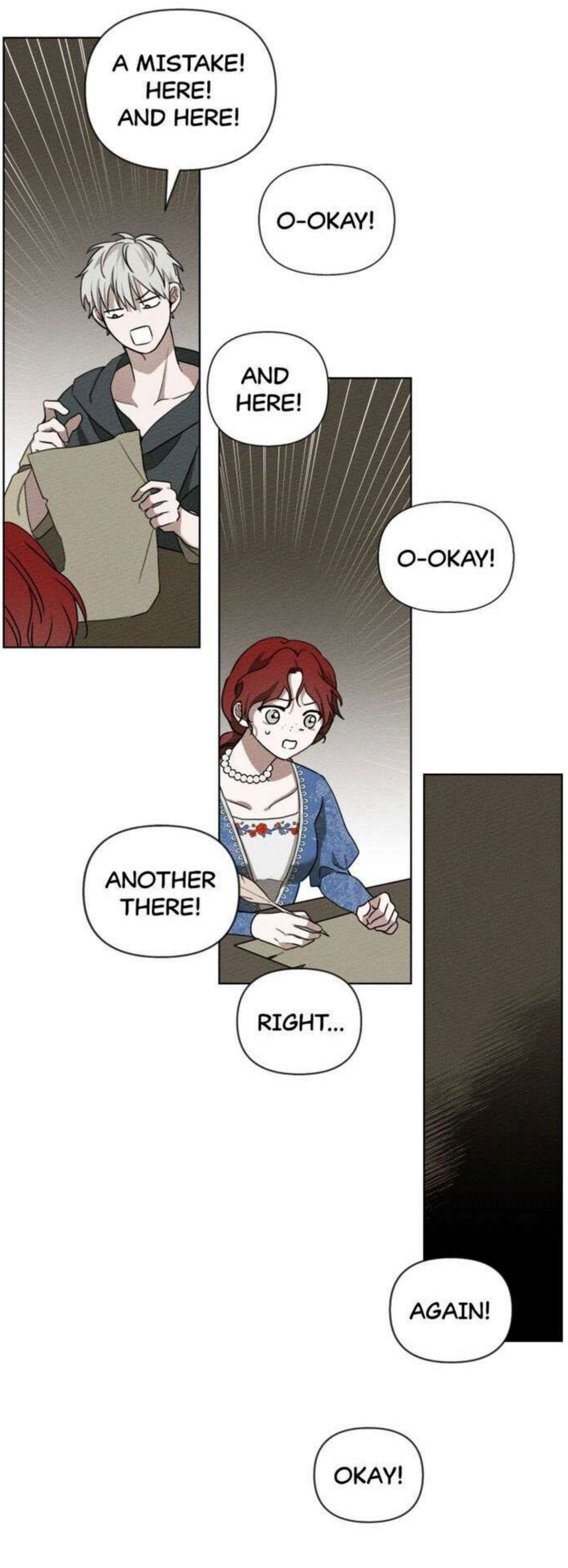

YOU TRULY ARE AS BRAZEN AS YOUR HUSBAND...
!!

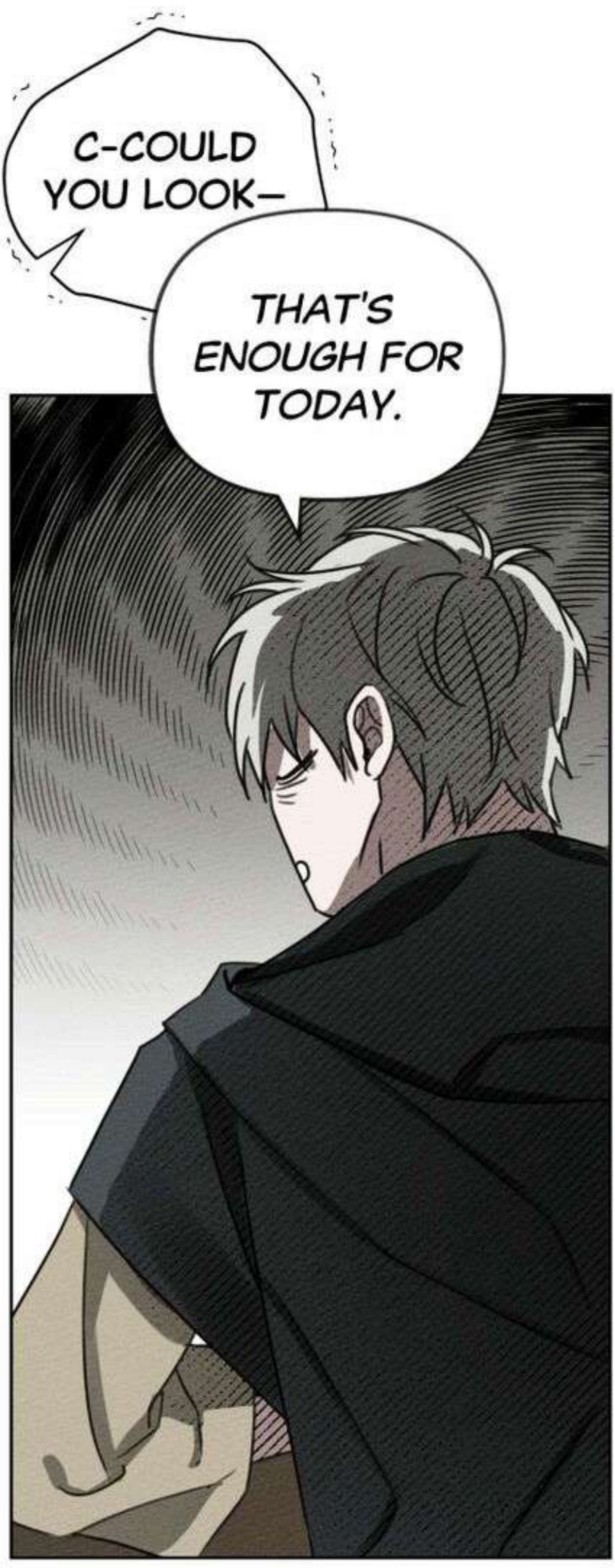

OF COURSE NOT! R-RIFTAN AND I ARE D-DIFFERENT.
H-HE'S RESPONSIBLE, A-AND L-LOYAL...

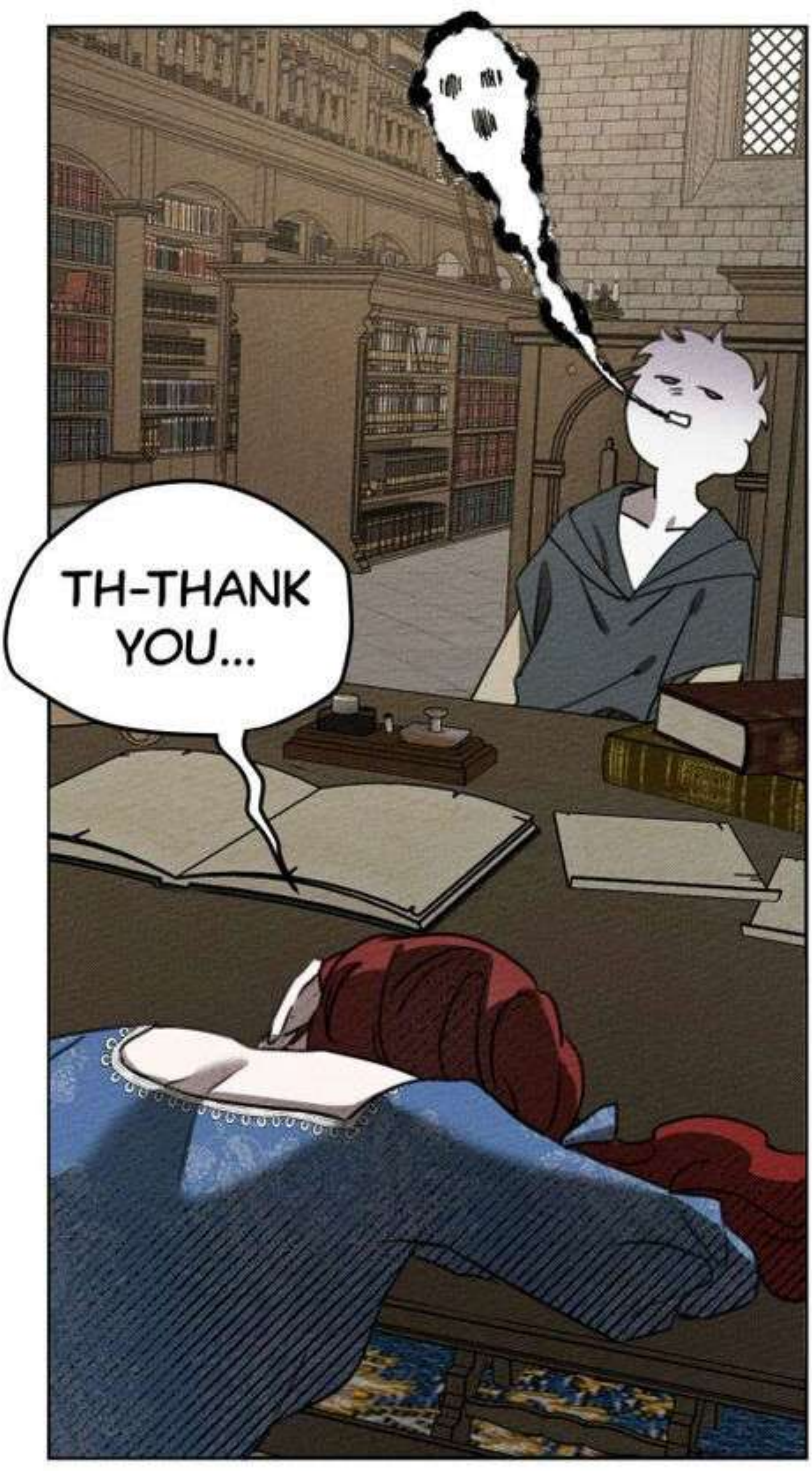
A-AND...

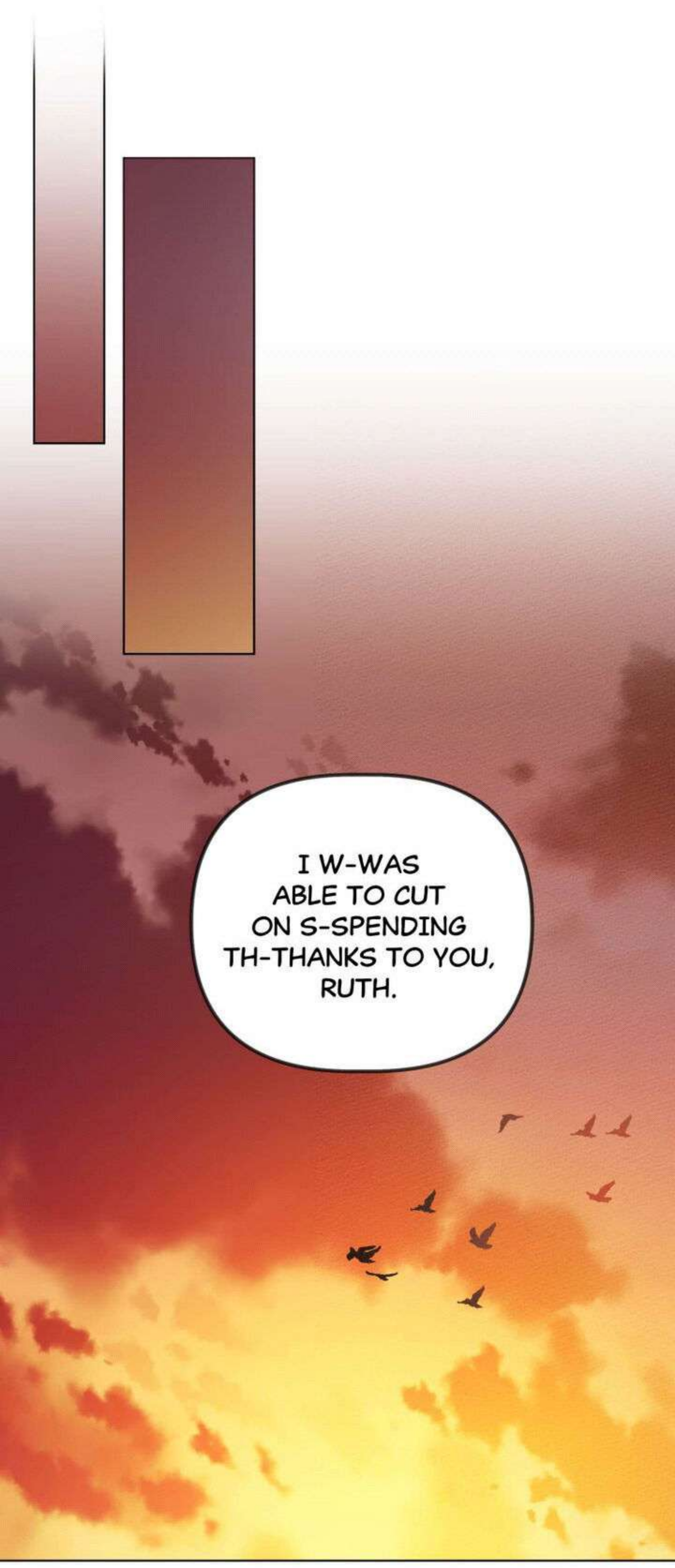
H-HE'S
A GREAT MAN.
...

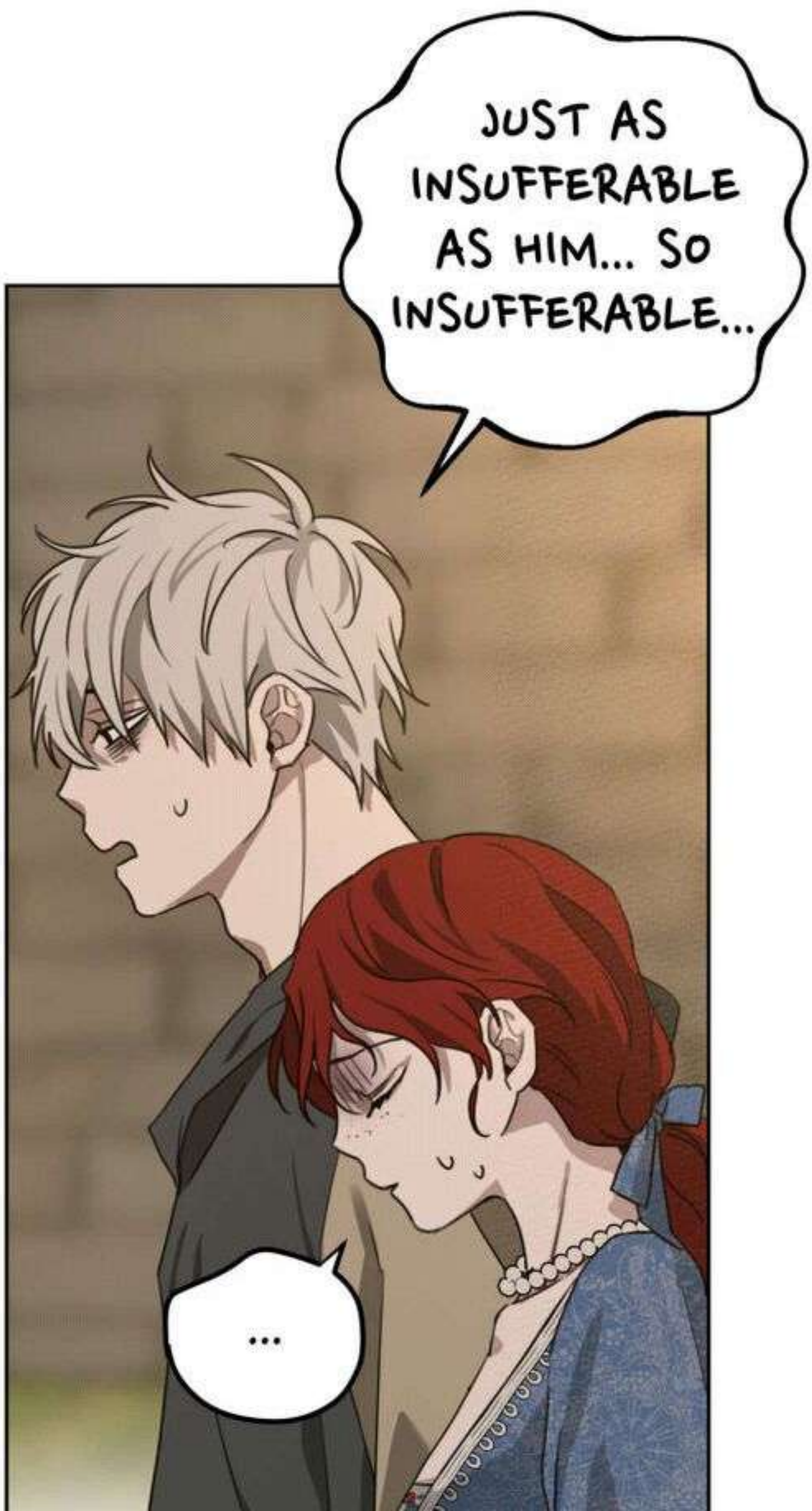
SIGH...
PLEASE FOCUS!
R-RIGHT!

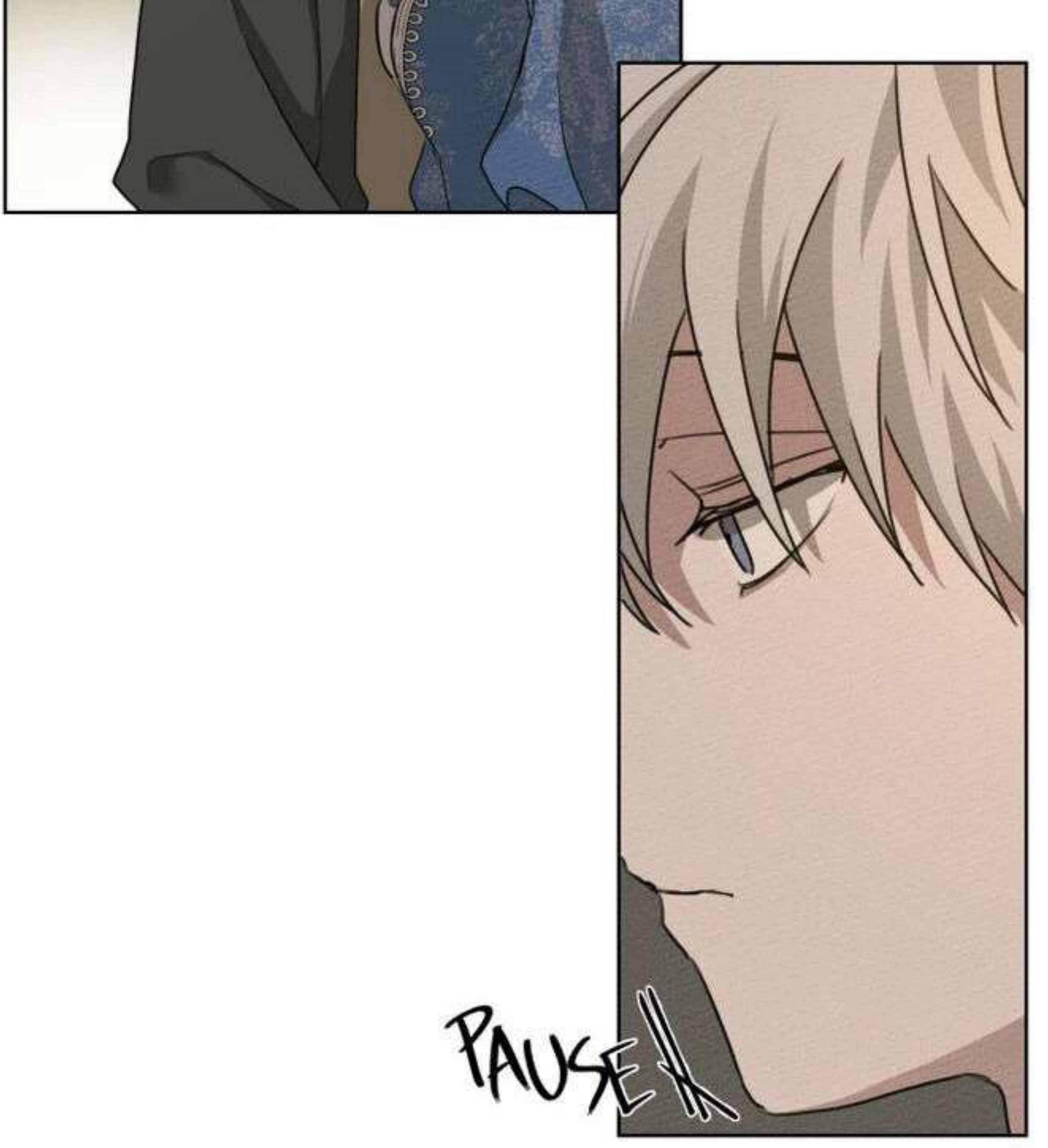

A MISTAKE! HERE! AND HERE!
O-OKAY!
AND HERE!
O-OKAY!
ANOTHER THERE!
RIGHT...
AGAIN!
OKAY!

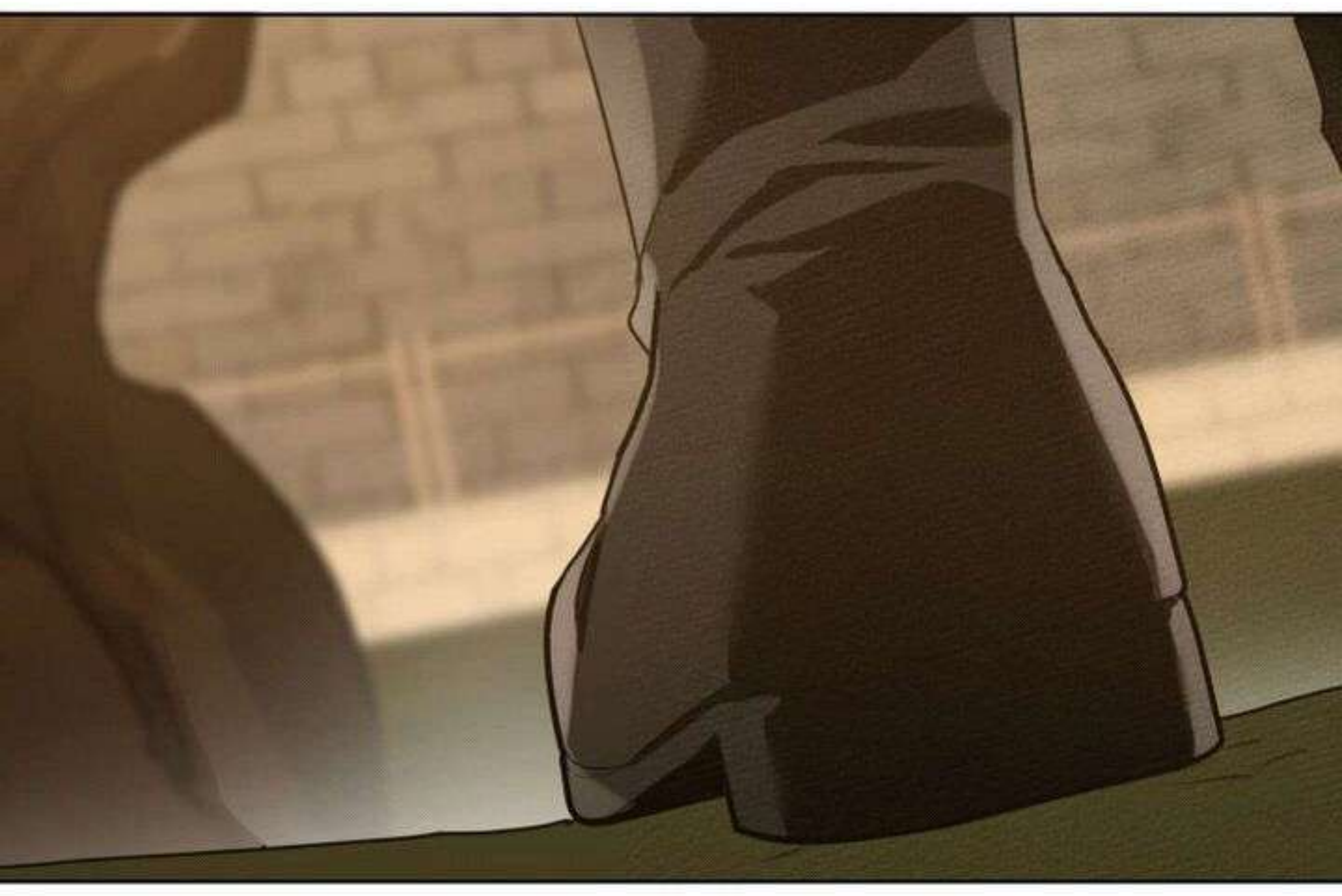

C-COULD YOU LOOK—
THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TODAY.

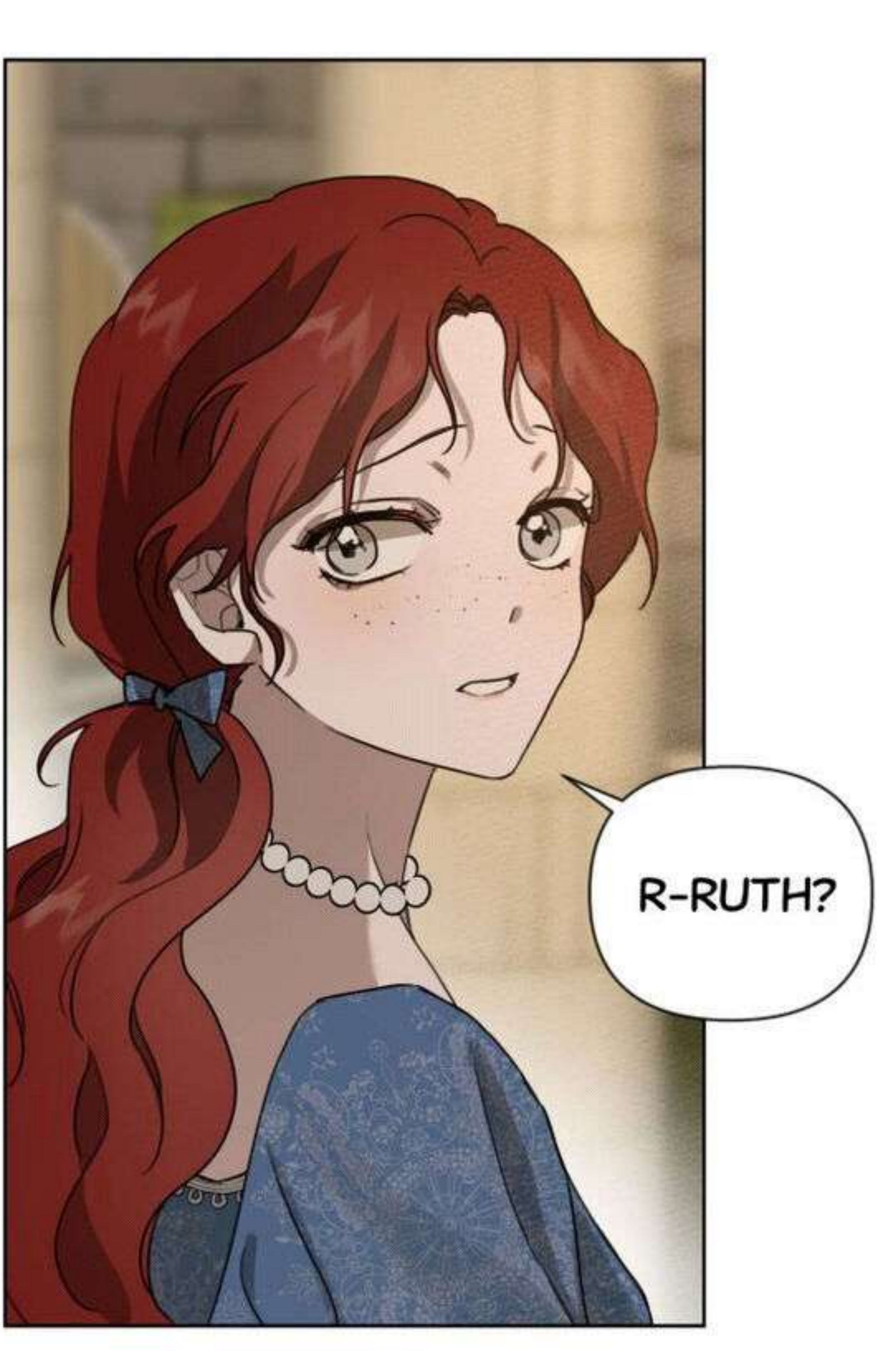

TH-THANK YOU...


I W-WAS ABLE TO CUT ON S-SPENDING TH-THANKS TO YOU, RUTH.

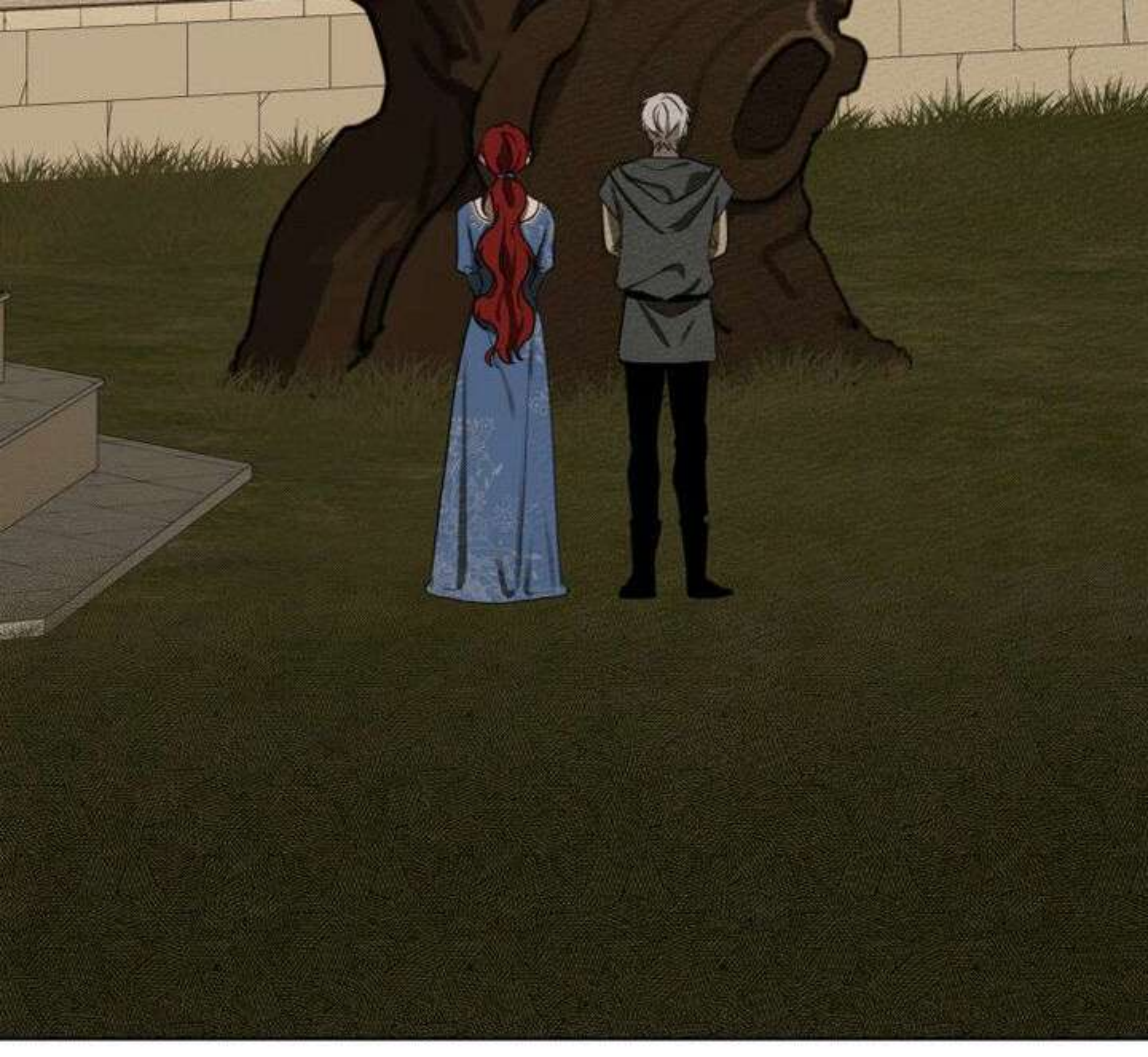

JUST AS INSUFFERABLE AS HIM... SO INSUFFERABLE...
...

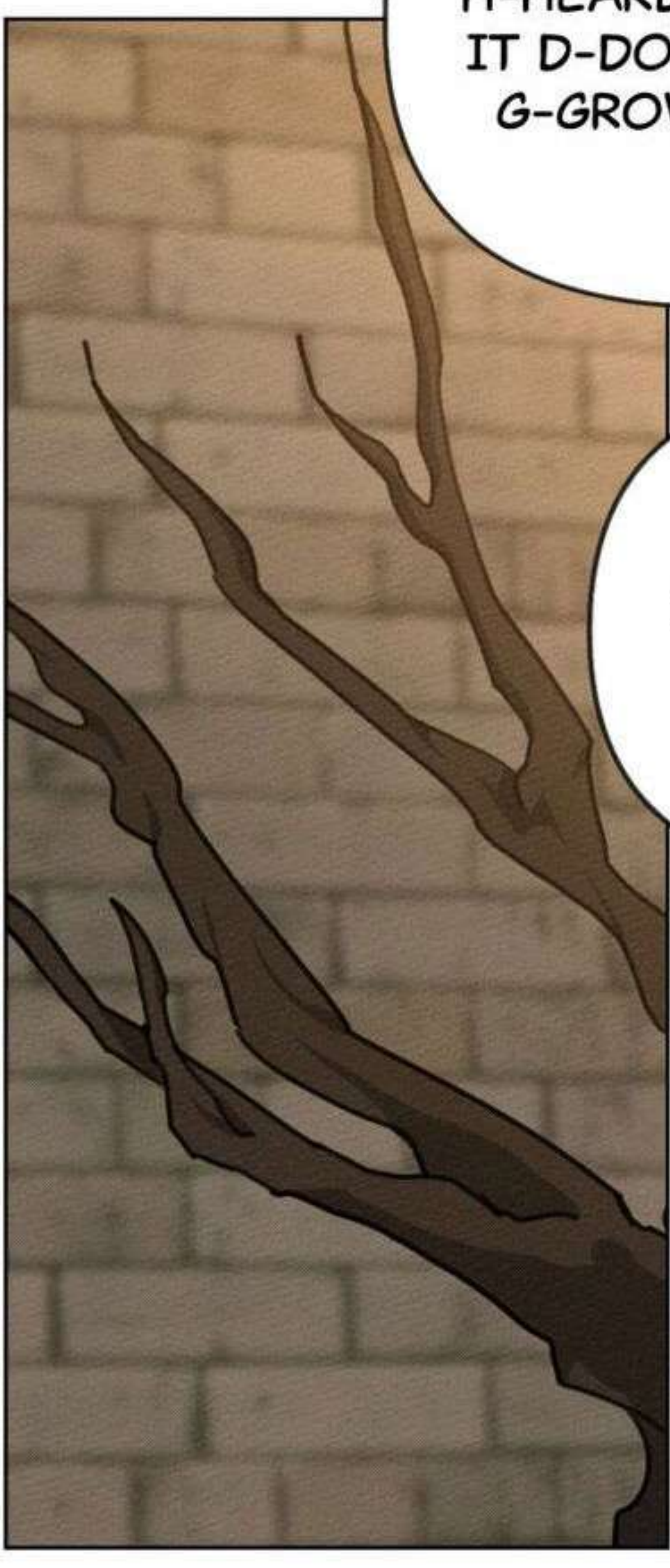

PAUSE

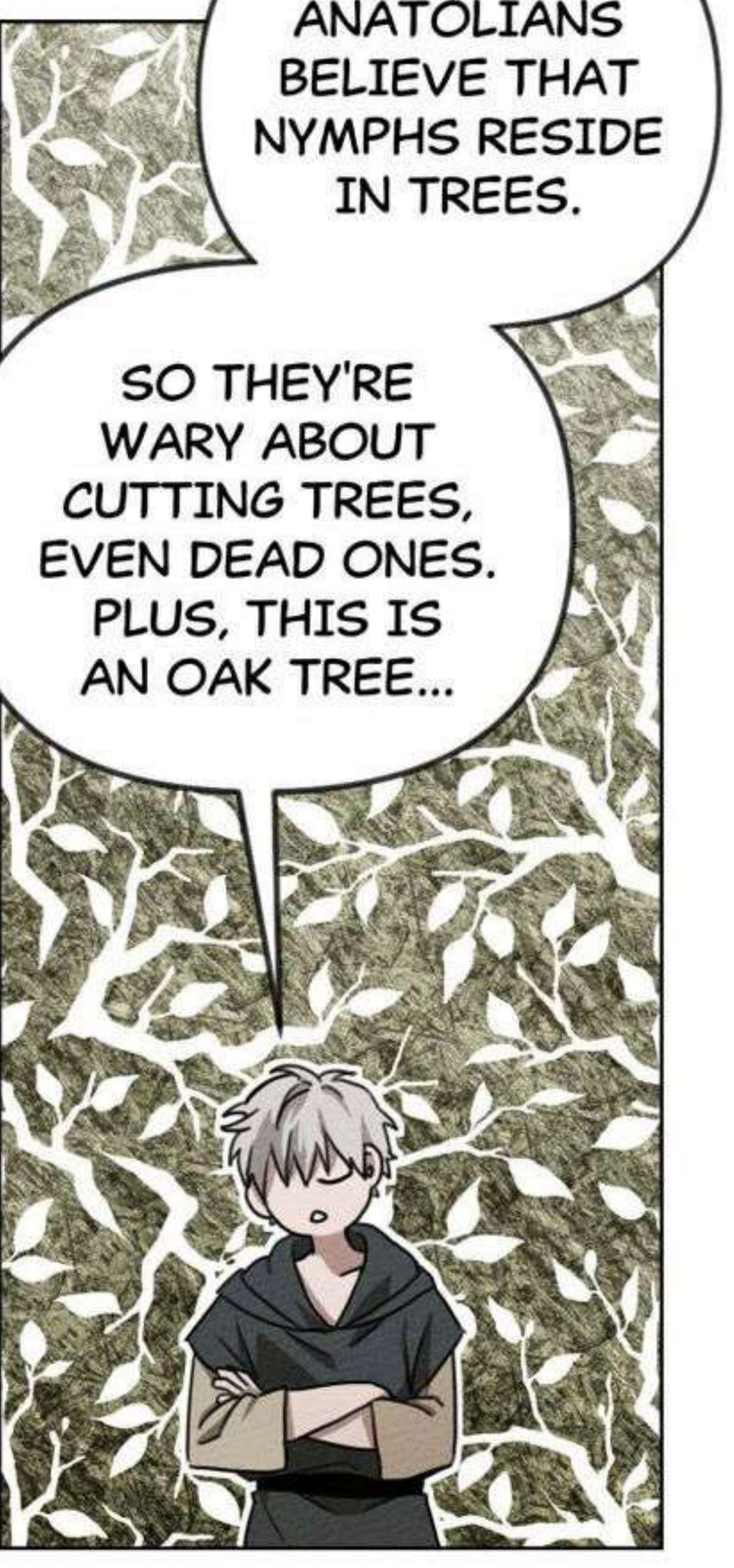


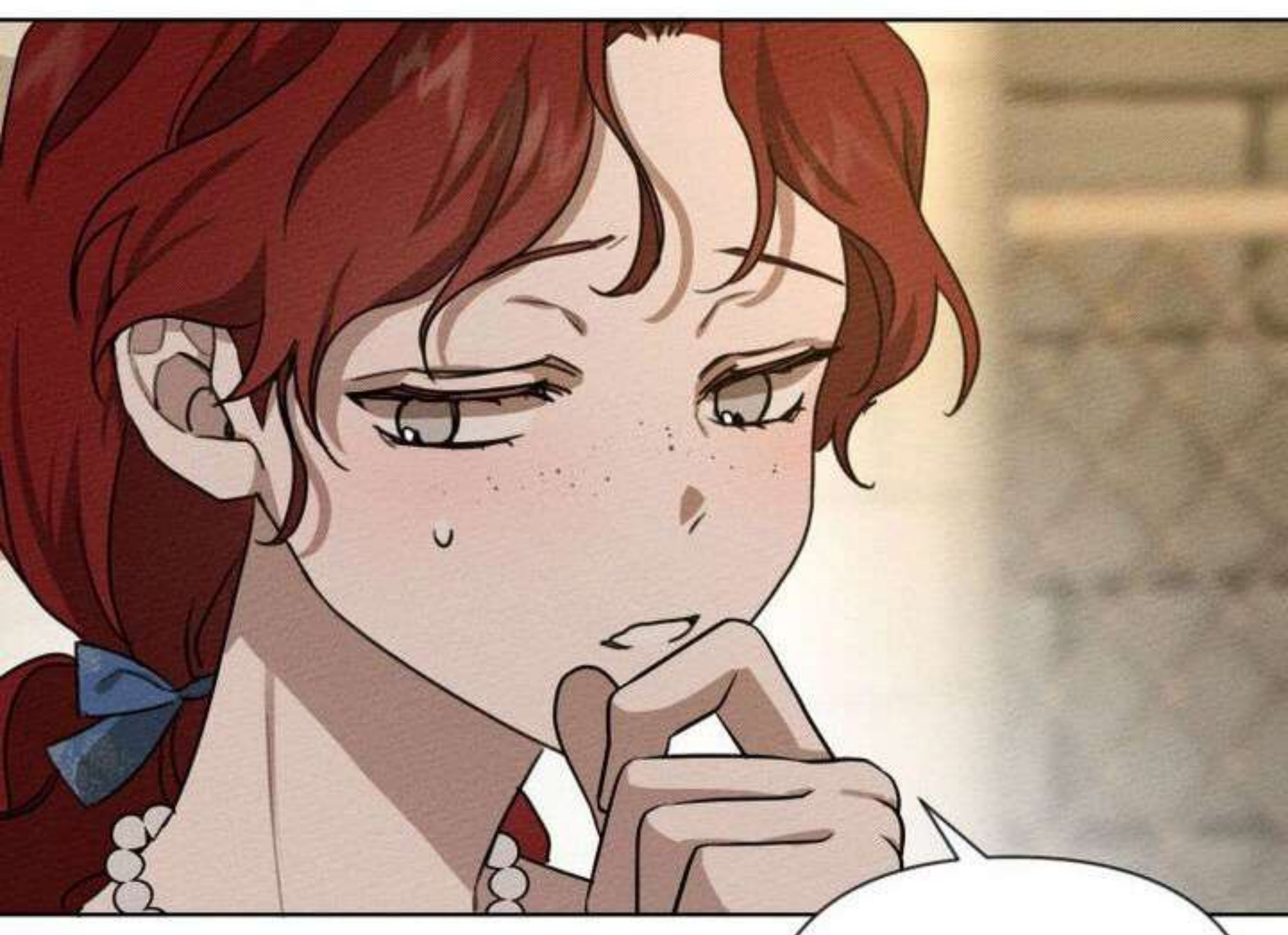

R-RUTH?

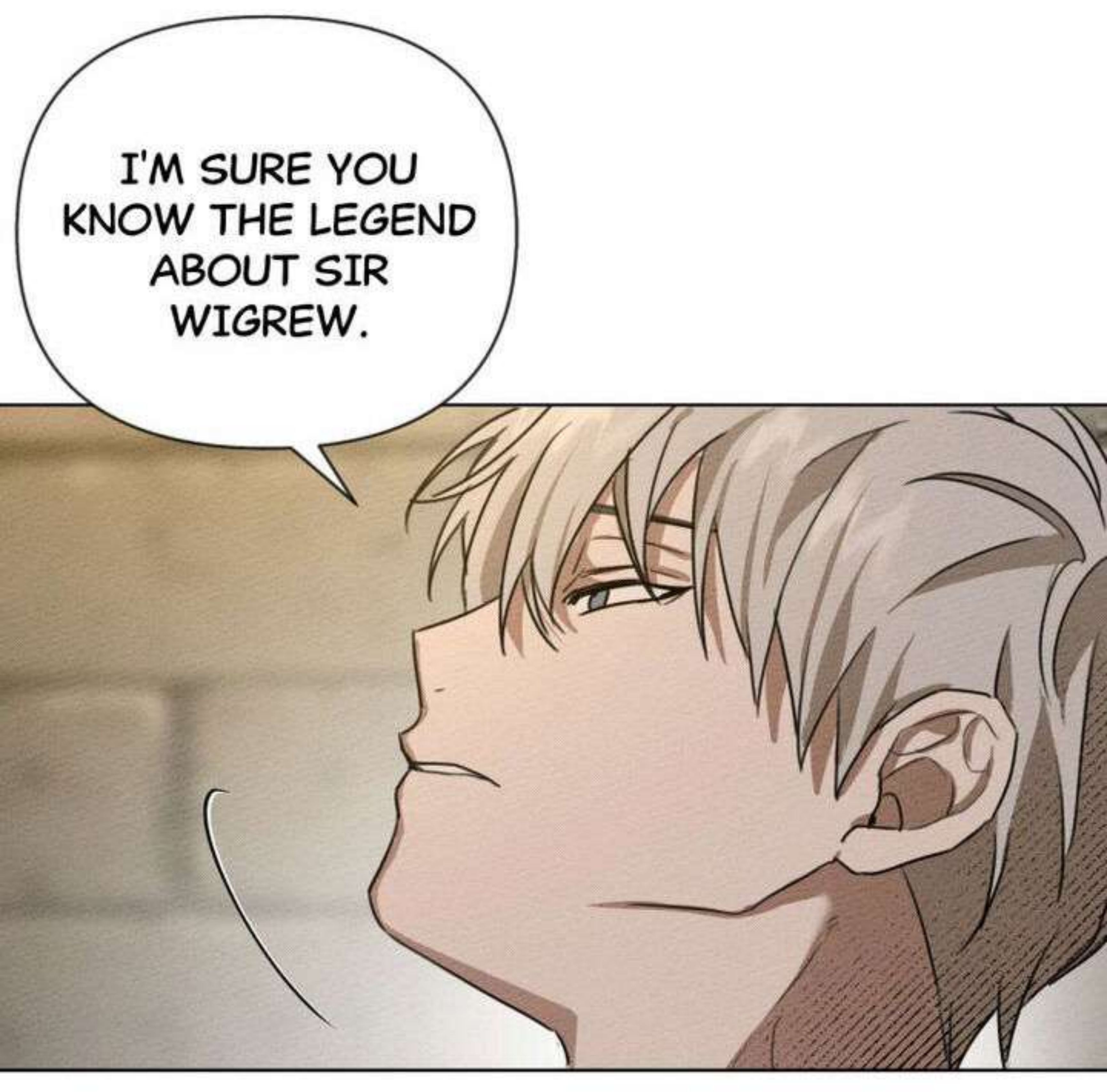
I SAW YOU HAVE PLANS TO LANDSCAPE THE GARDEN AS WELL.
Y-YES! I'M N-NOT SURE IF R-RIFTAN WILL L-LIKE IT THOUGH...
THE SERVANTS WILL BE FLUSTERED IF YOU ORDER THEM TO UPROOT THIS TREE.




B-BUT I H-HEARD IT'S DEAD. IT D-DOESN'T EVEN G-GROW LEAVES.
W-WOULDN'T IT BE B-BETTER TO USE IT AS FIREWOOD?


ANATOLIANS BELIEVE THAT NYMPHS RESIDE IN TREES.
SO THEY'RE WARY ABOUT CUTTING TREES, EVEN DEAD ONES. PLUS, THIS IS AN OAK TREE...

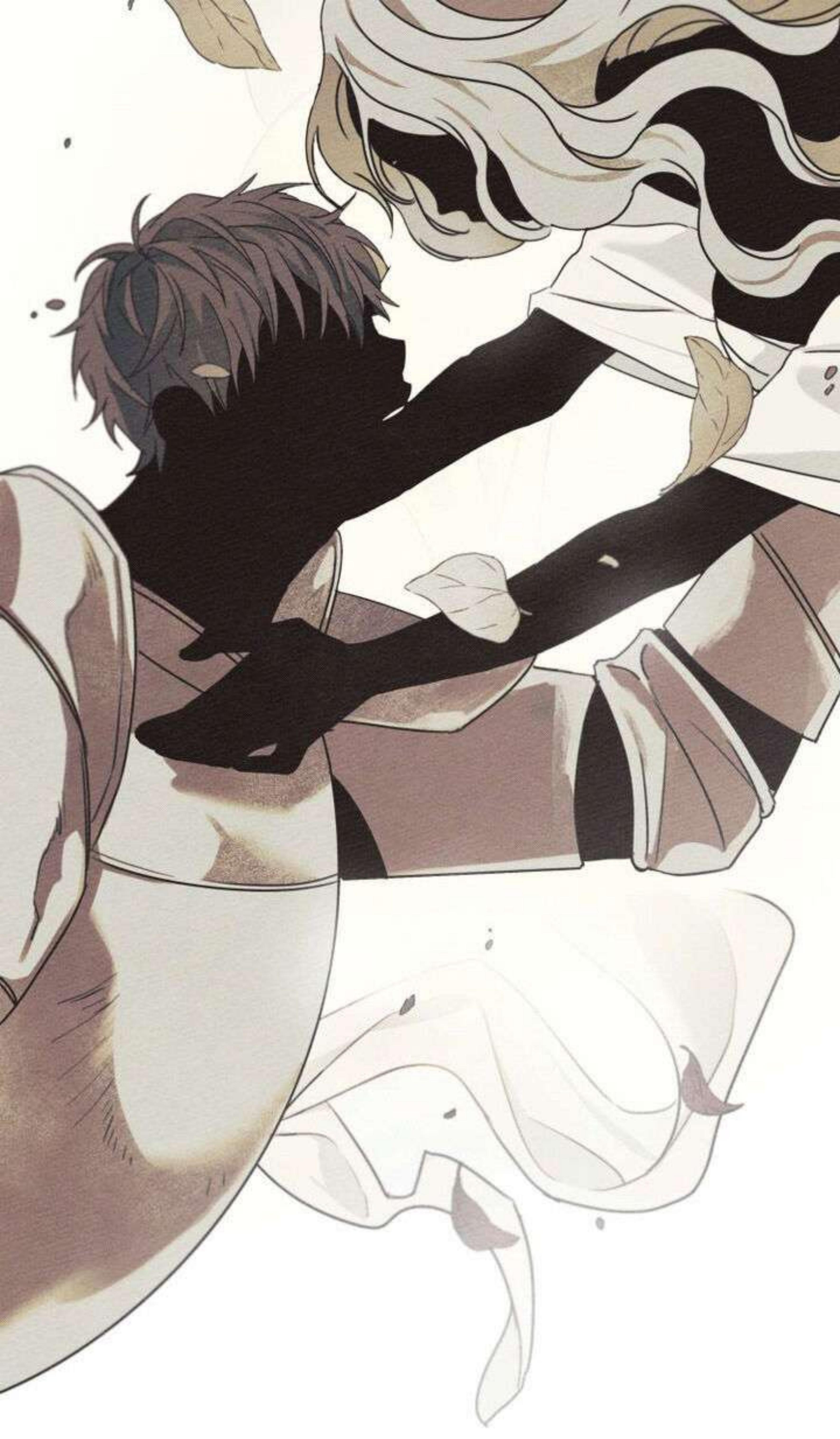

WH-WHAT'S S-SPECIAL ABOUT OAK TREES?


I'M SURE YOU KNOW THE LEGEND ABOUT SIR WIGREW.

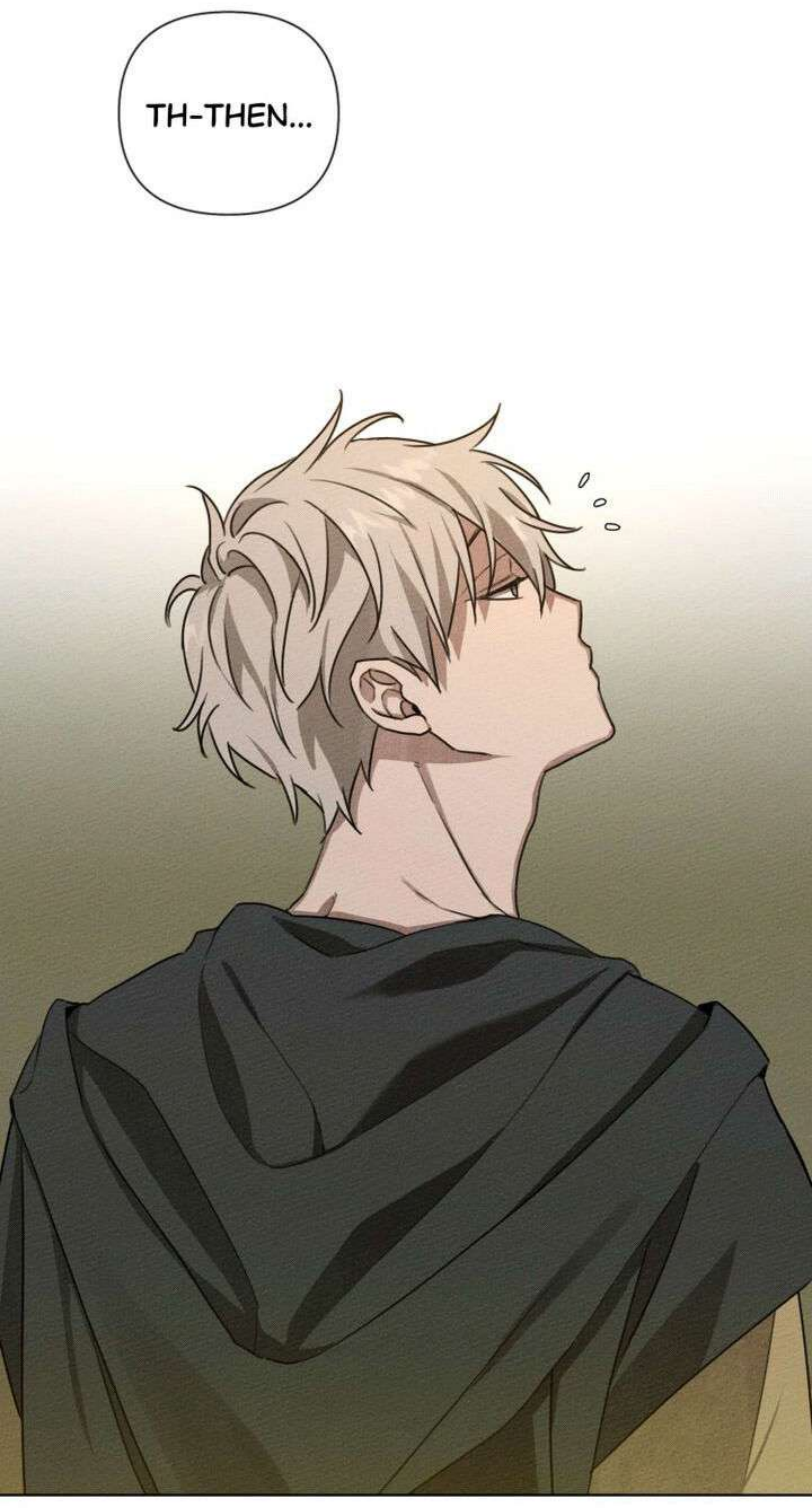
IT IS A STORY EVERY CHILD HAS HEARD AT LEAST ONCE.
THE STORY OF A MAN WHO ENDED AN ANCIENT, DARK WAR WITH A HOLY SWORD GIFTED BY THE GODS
AND LED THE FOUNDING OF THE ROEM EMPIRE,

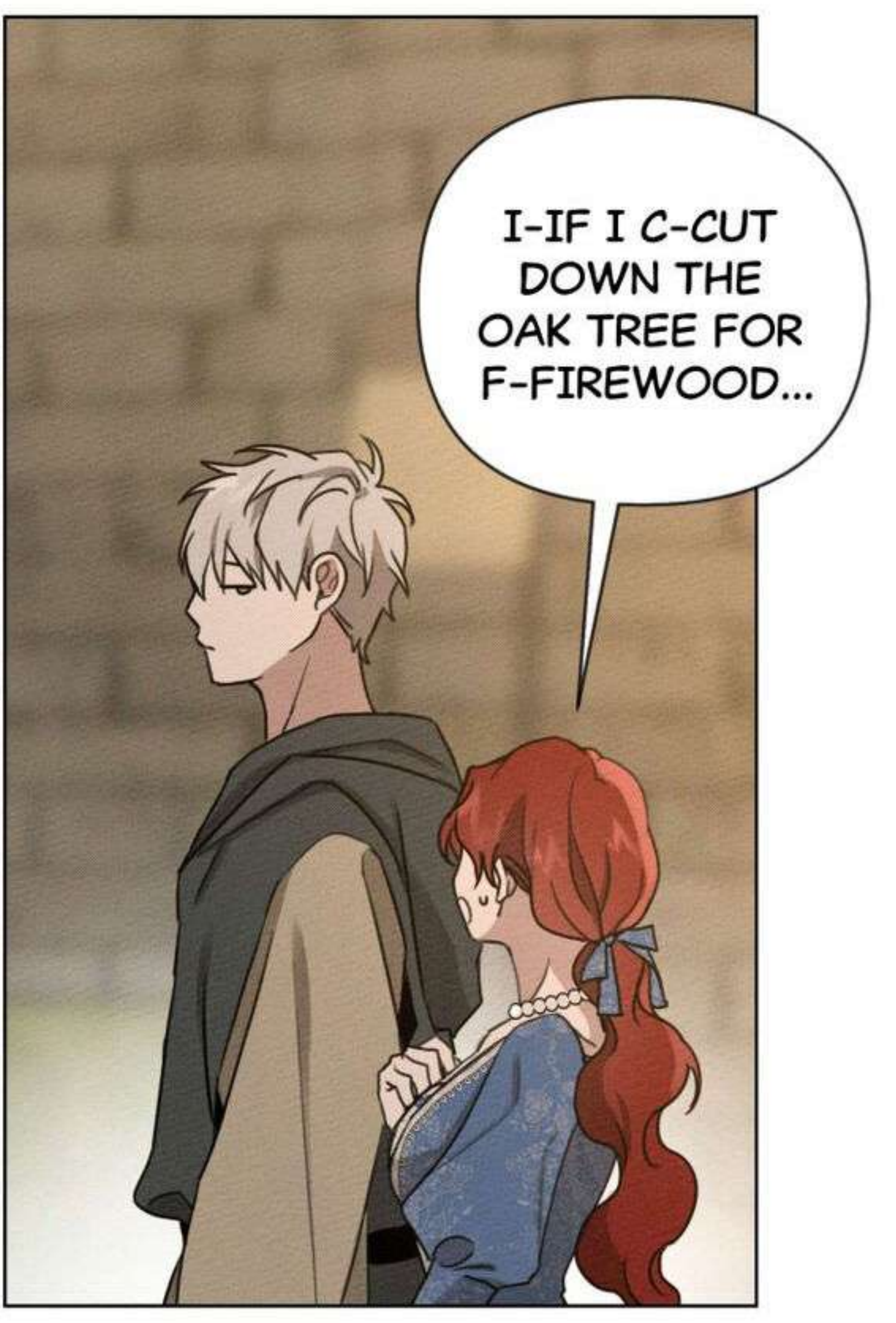
SIR WIGREW.
THE LEGEND TELLS HE ASCENDED TO HEAVEN ON A WHITE DRAGON AFTER FULFILLING HIS GIVEN DUTY.

THIS LEGEND IS A BIT MORE SPECIAL TO ANATOLIANS.
THEY BELIEVE THAT HE RODE THE HEAVENLY DRAGON
ON THE HILL OUTSIDE ANATOL CASTLE.
ANATOLIANS GROW UP LISTENING TO THIS STORY.
AND I'M SURE YOU KNOW HOW FAMOUS
THE LOVE STORY OF SIR WIGREW AND THE NYMPH OF THE OAK TREE IS.



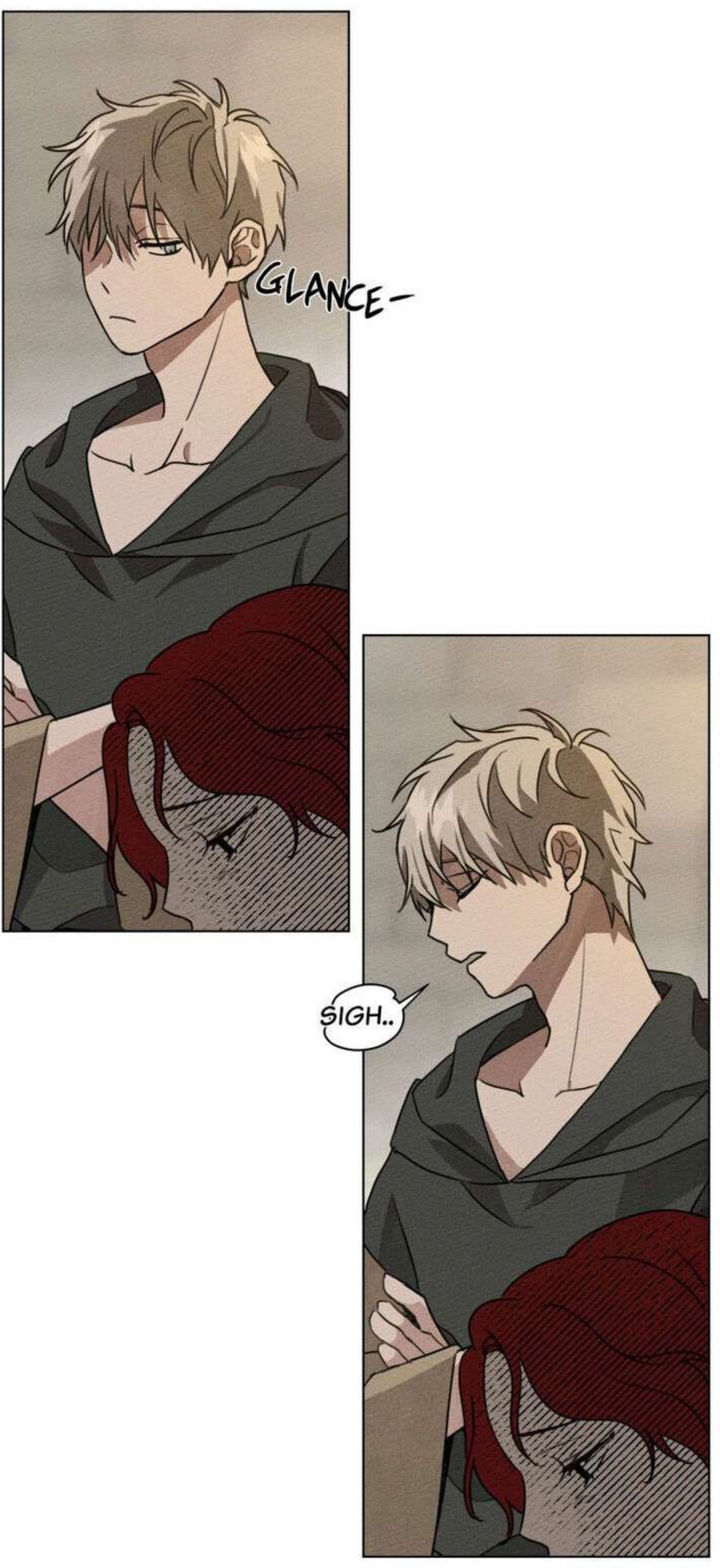
THE PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THE NYMPH IS STILL WAITING FOR SIR WIGREW'S RETURN.
SO MUCH THAT EVERY SPRING FESTIVAL, ALL THE MAIDENS GO TO THE FIELDS
TO SING SONGS OF PRAISE FOR THE NYMPH'S LOVE.


TH-THEN...


I-IF I C-CUT DOWN THE OAK TREE FOR F-FIREWOOD...

THE PEOPLE WOULD HATE YOU. THEY WOULDN'T BE OBVIOUS ABOUT IT SINCE YOU'RE THE LADY OF THE ESTATE.
THE PEOPLE HERE JUST LOVE SIR WIGREW TOO MUCH.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?
I CAN'T JUST LEAVE A DEAD TREE HERE. IT LOOKS SO GHASTLY.


GLANCE-
SIGH..

I'LL SEE IF IT CAN BE REVIVED.

Under the Oak Tree

ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

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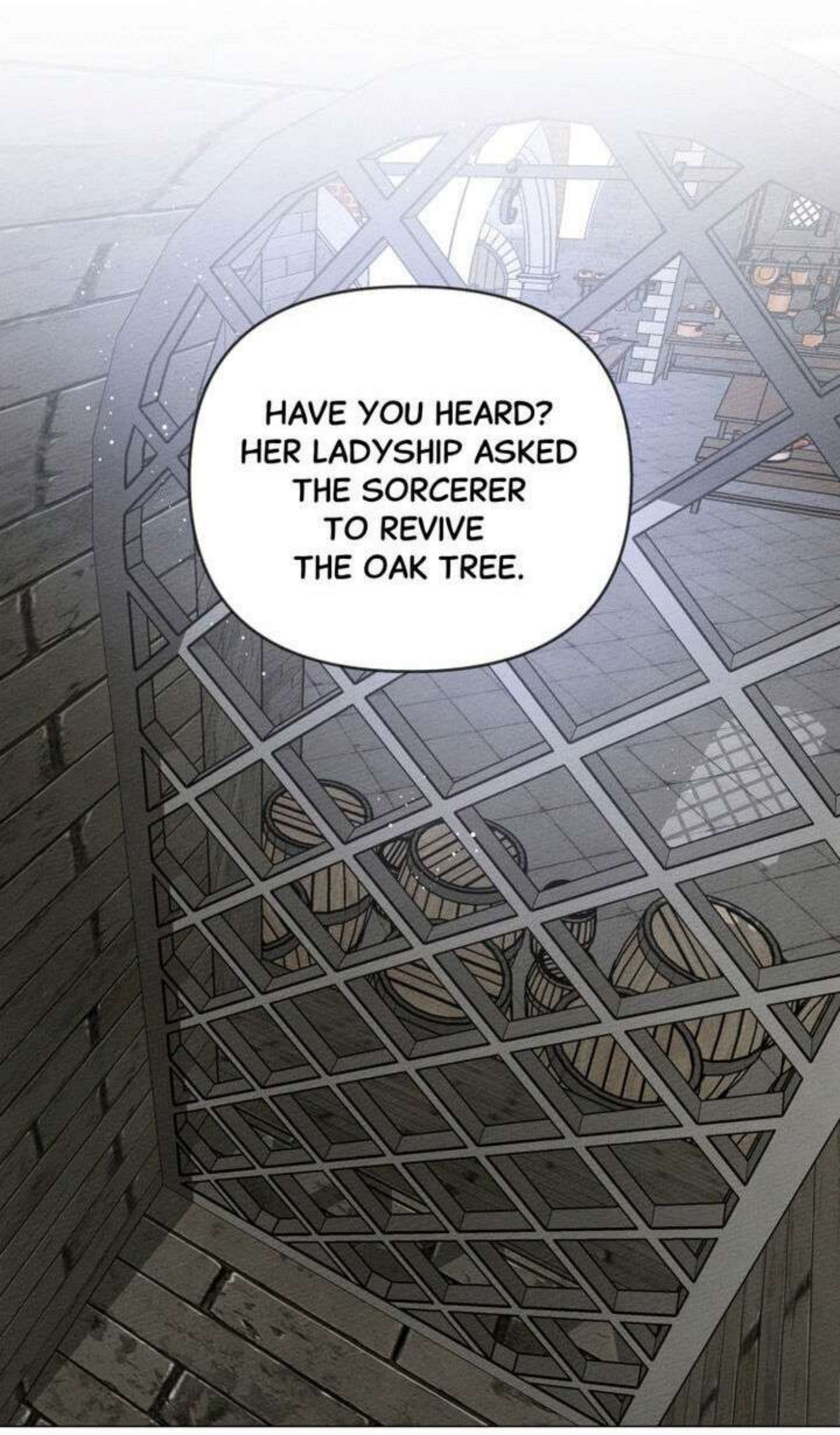
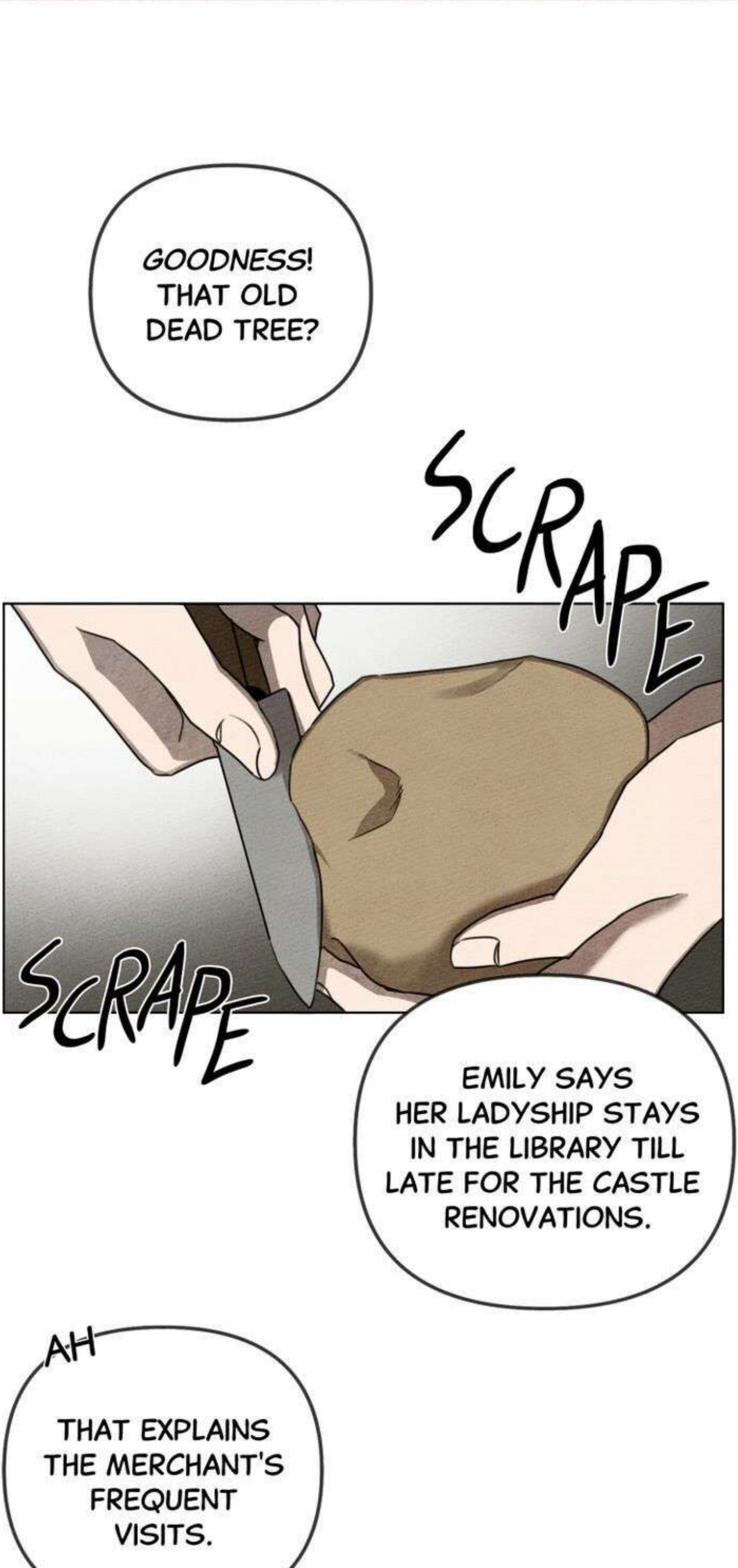
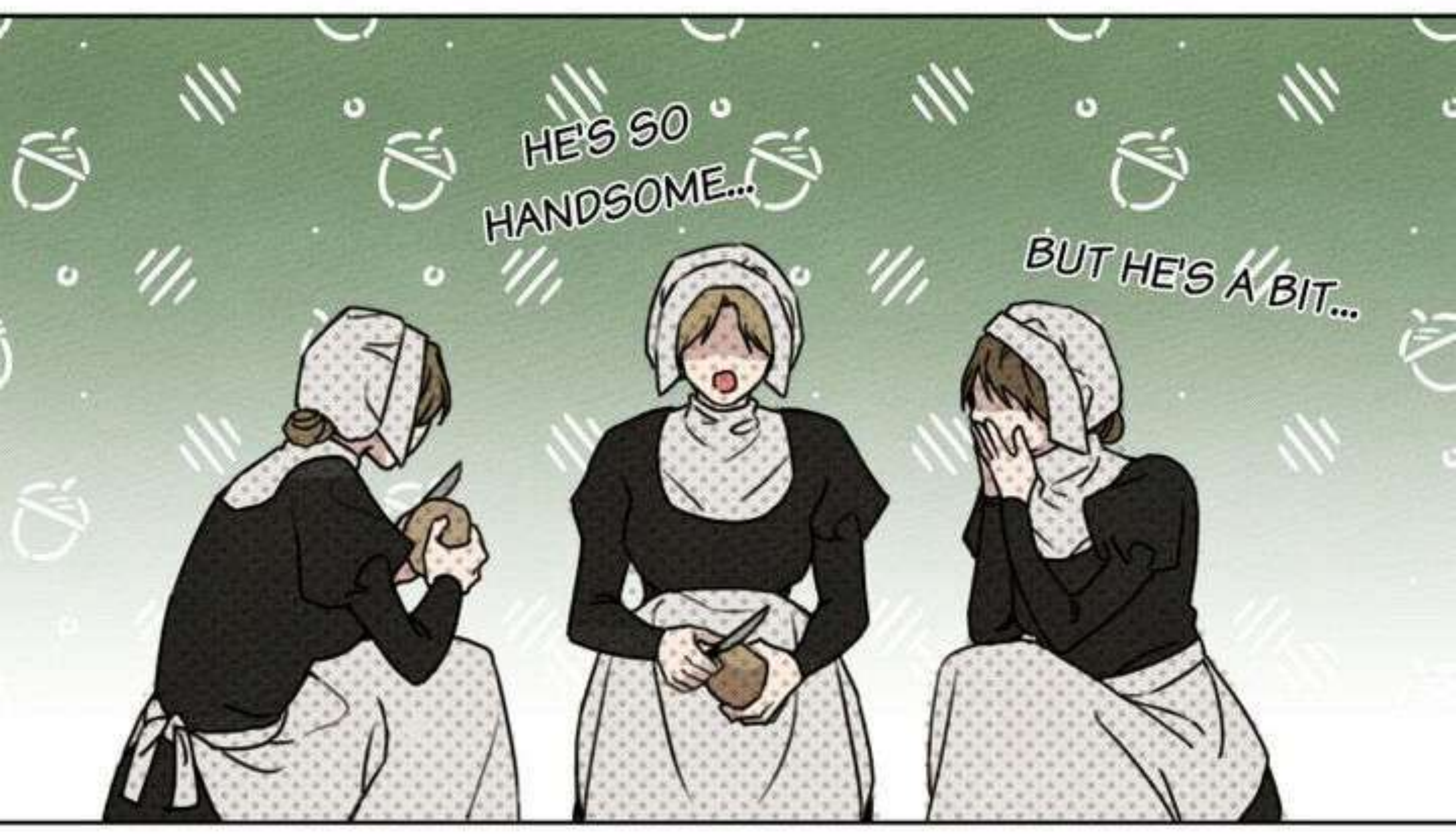
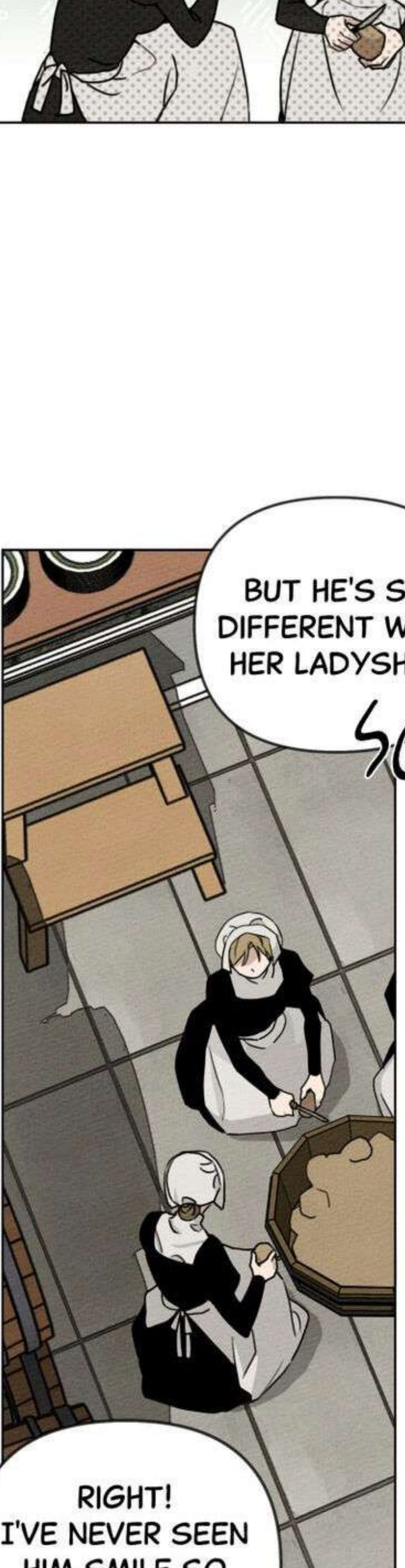

HAVE YOU HEARD? HER LADYSHIP ASKED THE SORCERER TO REVIVE THE OAK TREE.


GOODNESS! THAT OLD DEAD TREE?
SCRAPE
SCRAPE
EMILY SAYS HER LADYSHIP STAYS IN THE LIBRARY TILL LATE FOR THE CASTLE RENOVATIONS.
AH
THAT EXPLAINS THE MERCHANT'S FREQUENT VISITS.

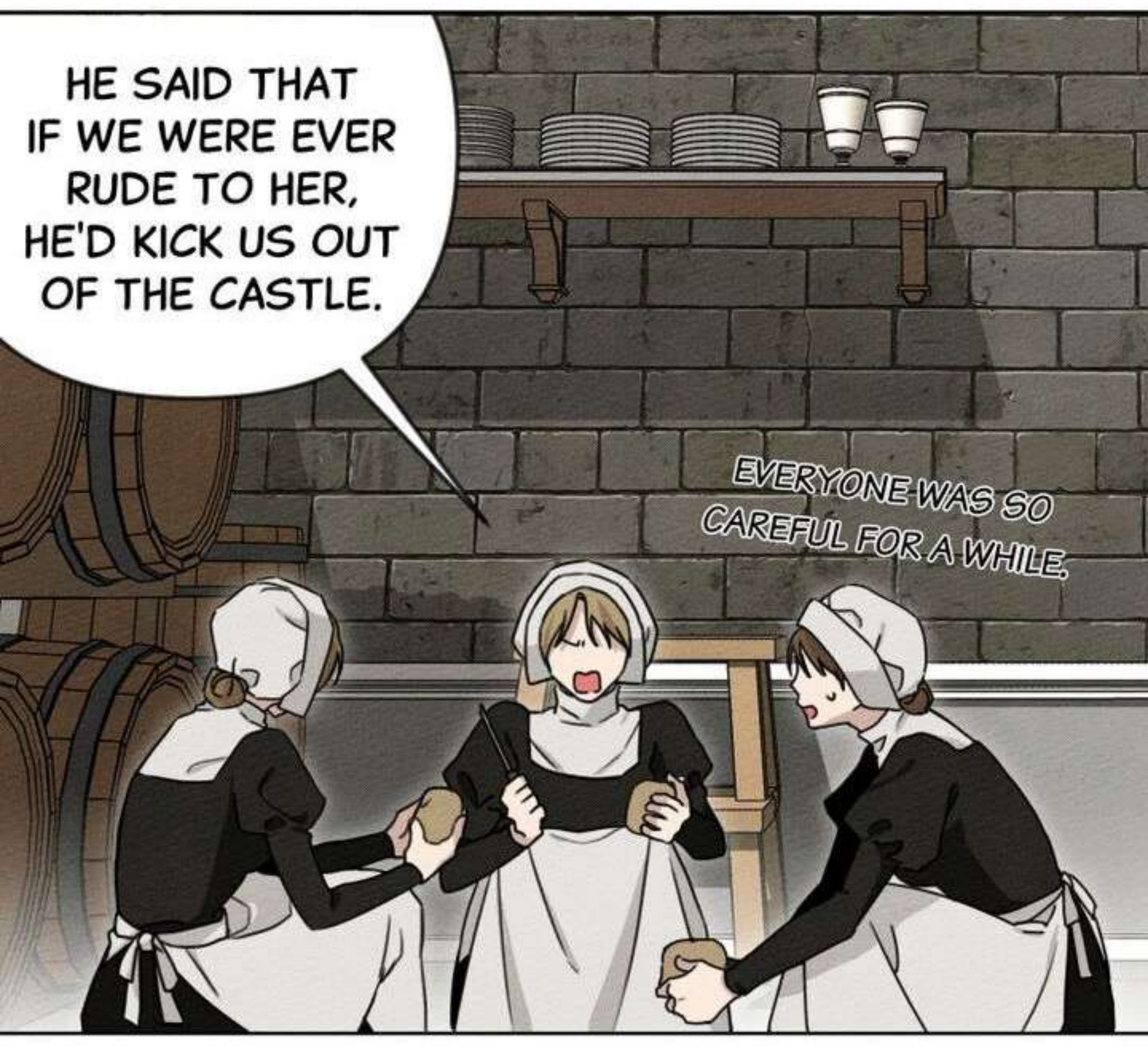
LUDIS WORRIES THAT HER LADYSHIP MIGHT BE OVERWORKING HERSELF WHEN SHE'S ONLY JUST RECOVERED.
SCRAPE
WOW... SHE'S SO DUTIFUL.
ON HER ARRIVAL, SHE DEFLECTED THE LORD'S ANGER AWAY FROM US. REMEMBER THAT?
I WAS SO TERRIFIED!
I FELT LIKE I COULDN'T BREATHE!

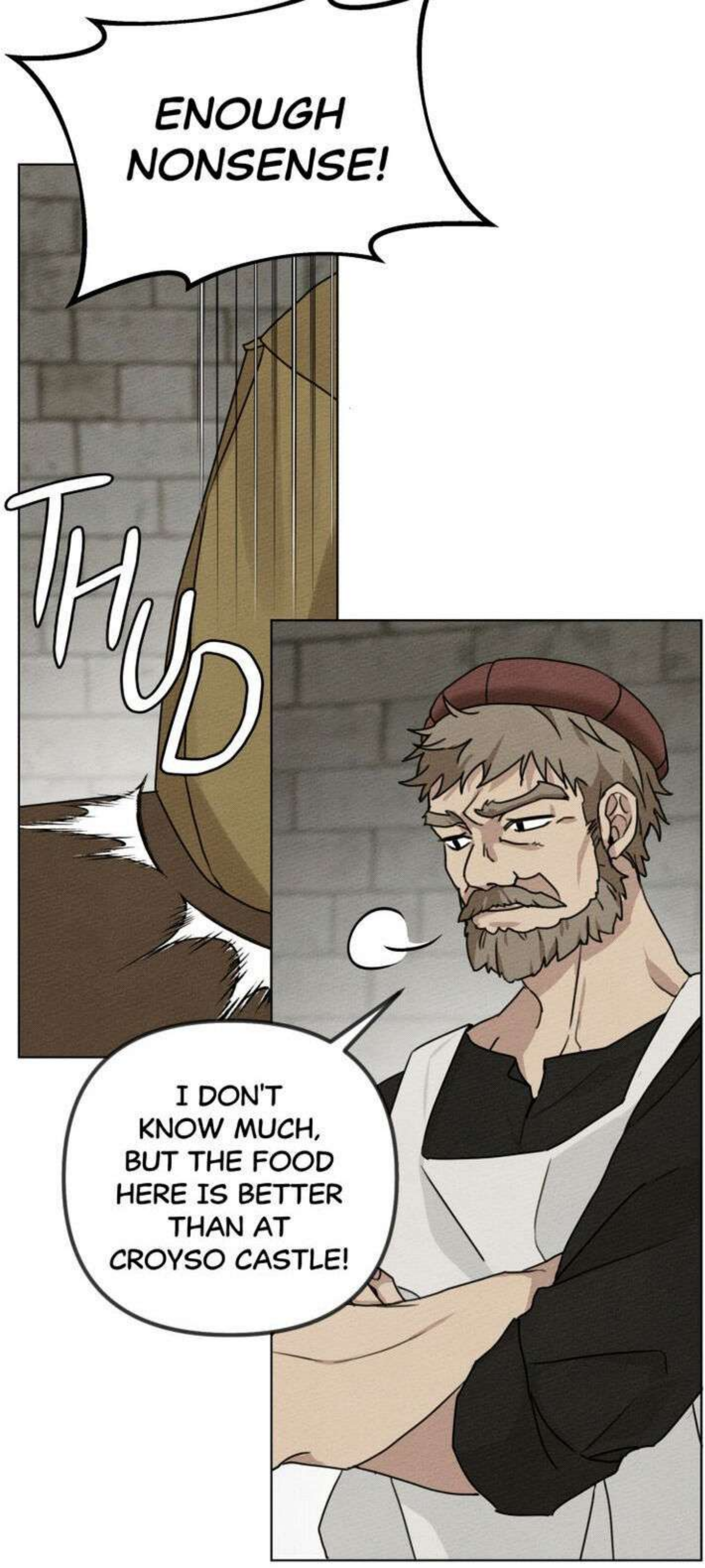
I NEARLY FAINTED.

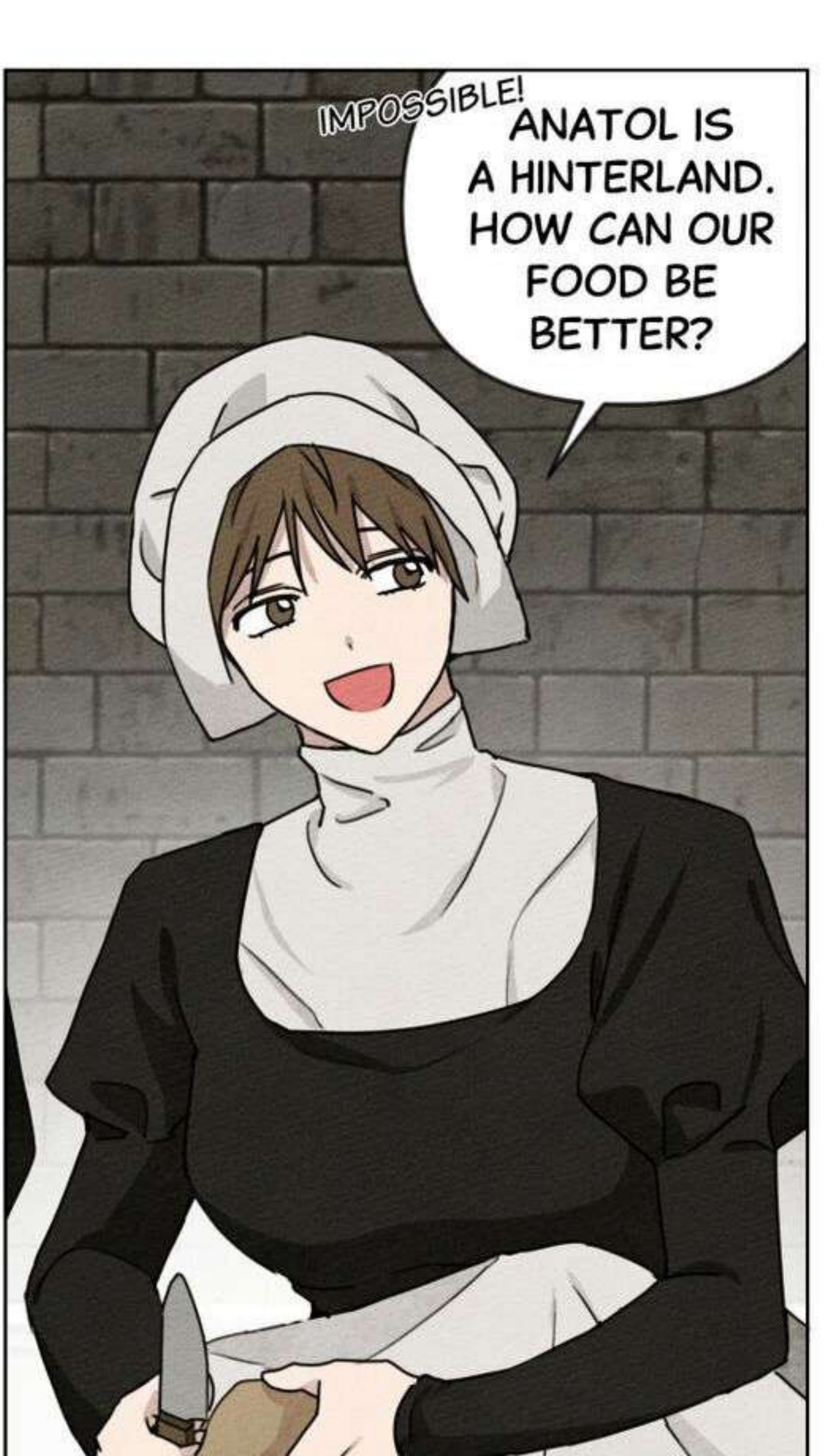

HE'S SO HANDSOME...
BUT HE'S A BIT...

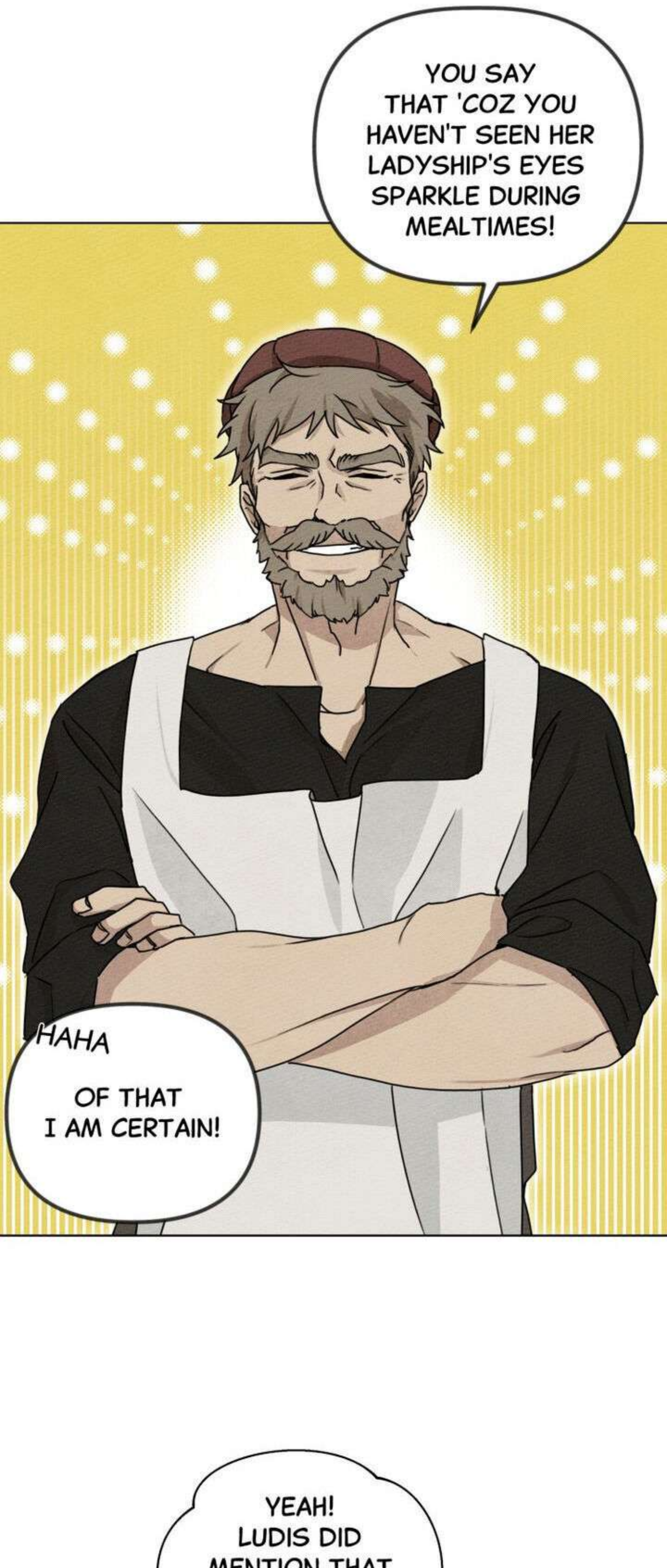

BUT HE'S SO DIFFERENT WITH HER LADYSHIP.
SCRAPE
RIGHT! I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM SMILE SO BRIGHTLY BEFORE.

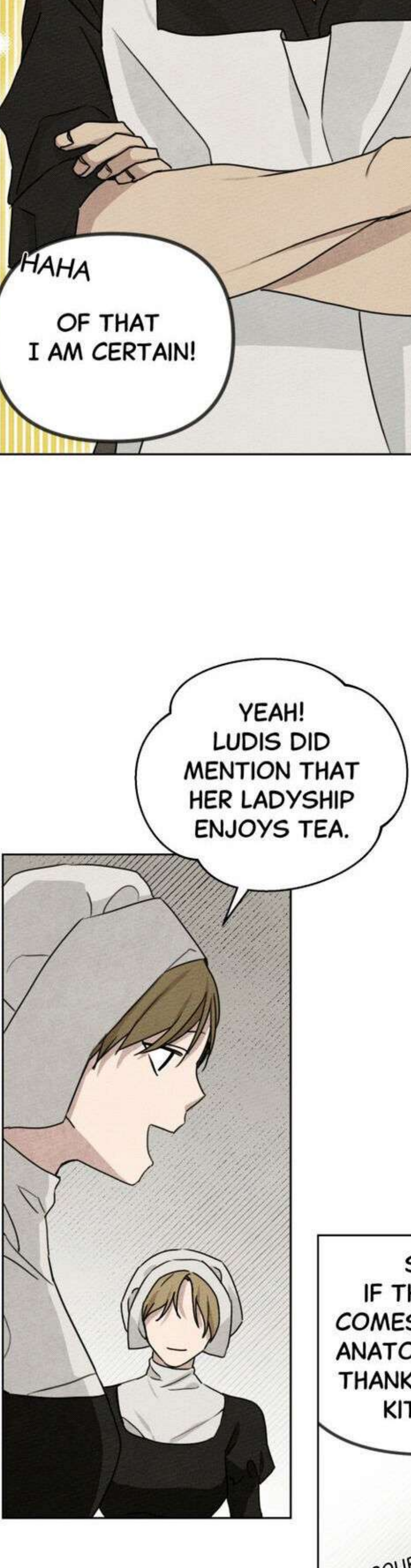
SCRAPE
I GUESS THE RUMORS ABOUT HIS AFFAIR WITH PRINCESS AGNES ARE ALL FALSE.
IF THAT WERE TRUE, HE WOULDN'T HAVE BROUGHT HER LADYSHIP HERE.
OR TELL US OVER AND OVER TO TREAT HER WITH RESPECT...

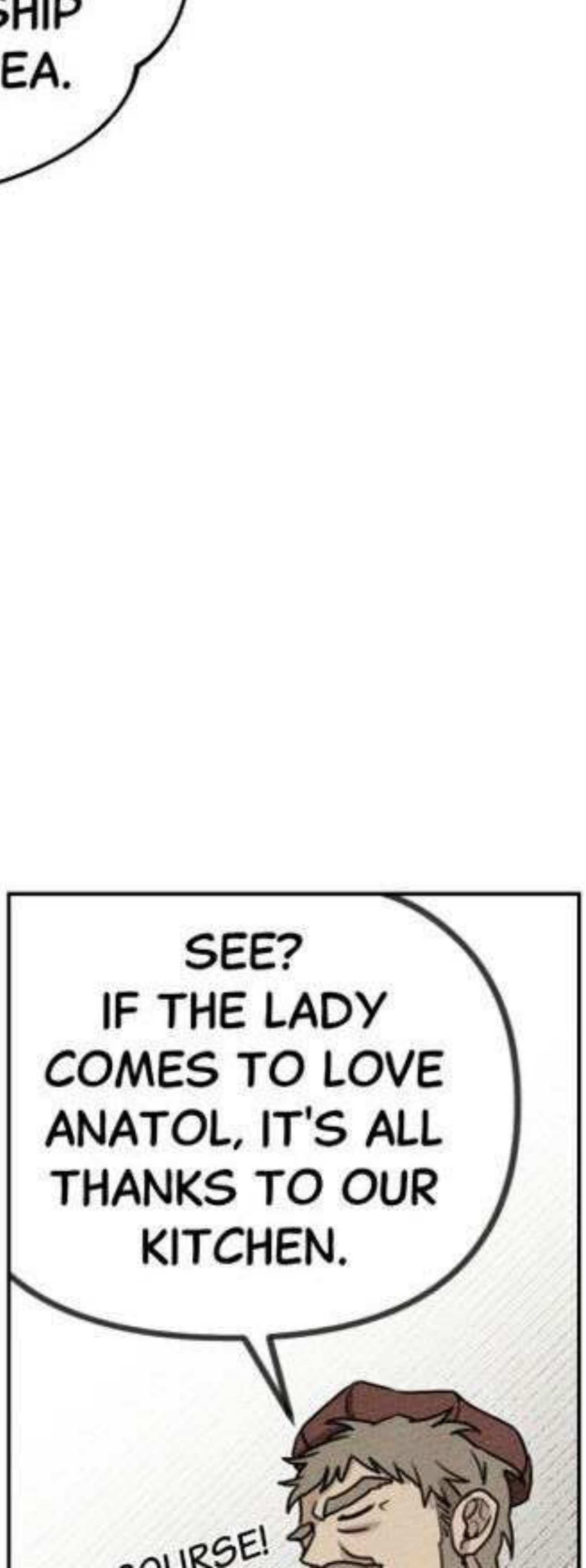

HE SAID THAT IF WE WERE EVER RUDE TO HER, HE'D KICK US OUT OF THE CASTLE.
EVERYONE WAS SO CAREFUL FOR A WHILE.
I OVERHEARD THE MERCHANT SAYING HOW CROYSO CASTLE IS GRANDER THAN THE ROYAL PALACE.
COMPARED TO THE DUCHY, ANATOL IS...

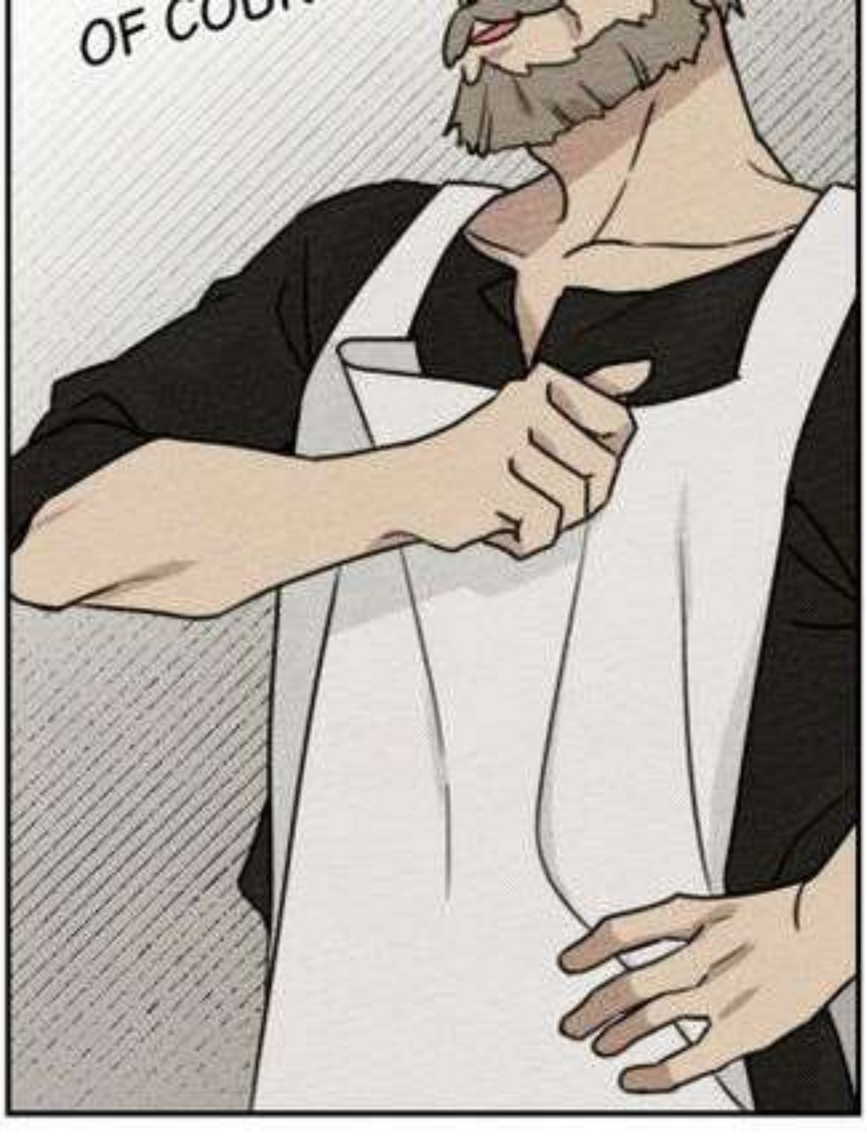

ENOUGH NONSENSE!
THUD
I DON'T KNOW MUCH, BUT THE FOOD HERE IS BETTER THAN AT CROYSO CASTLE!


IMPOSSIBLE!
ANATOL IS A HINTERLAND. HOW CAN OUR FOOD BE BETTER?

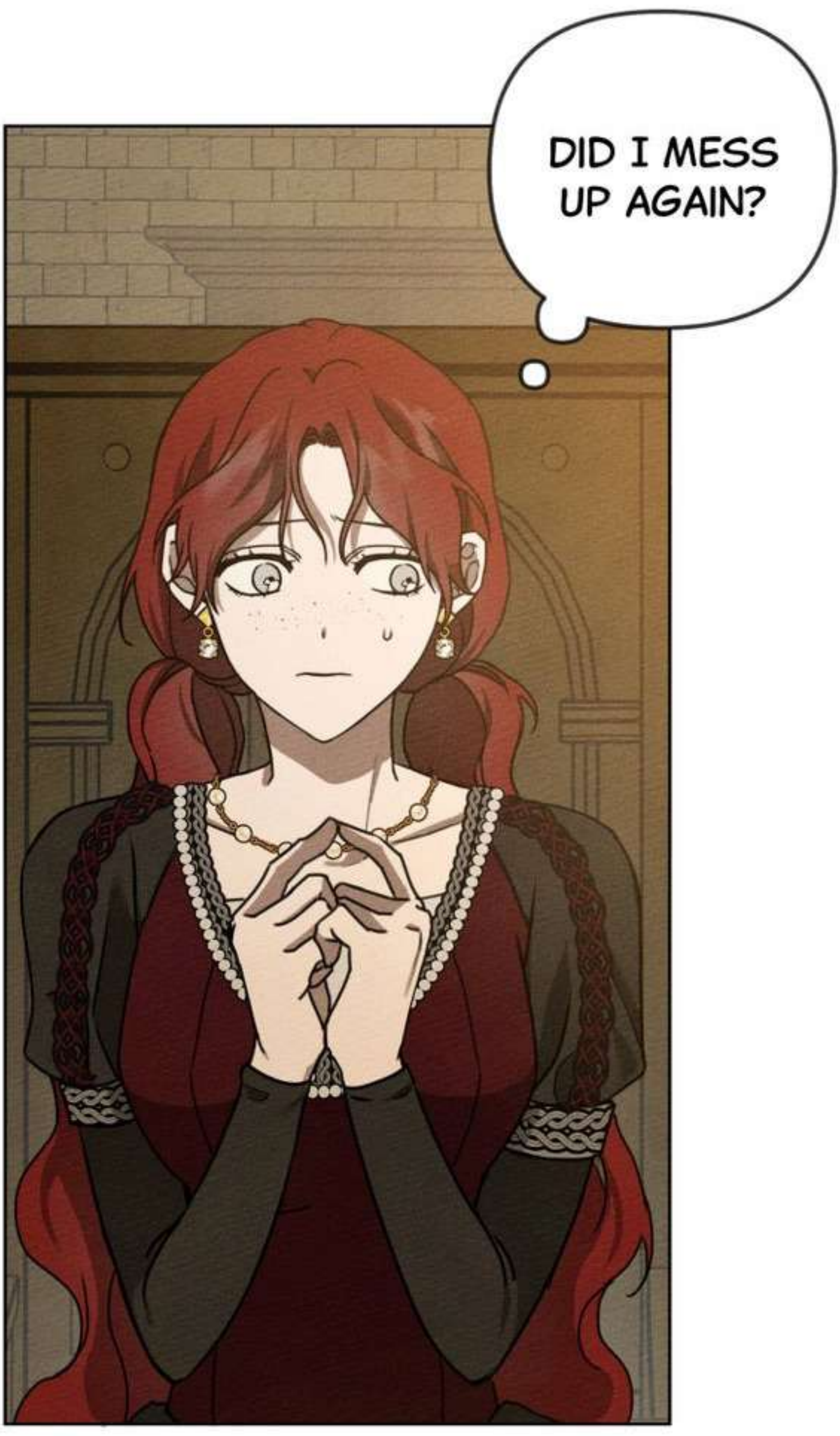

YOU SAY THAT 'COZ YOU HAVEN'T SEEN HER LADYSHIP'S EYES SPARKLE DURING MEALTIMES!
HAHA
OF THAT I AM CERTAIN!


YEAH! LUDIS DID MENTION THAT HER LADYSHIP ENJOYS TEA.

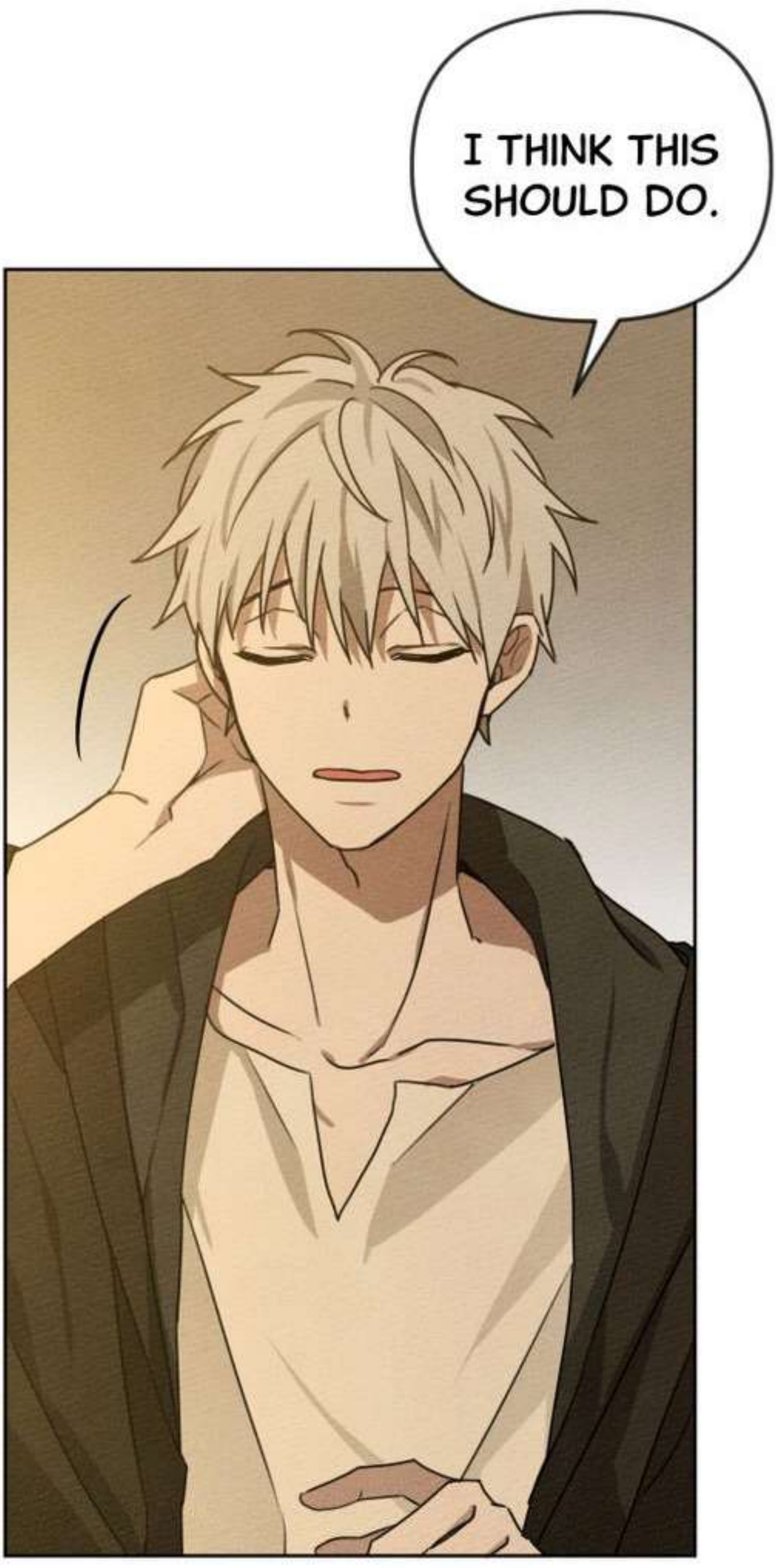

SEE? IF THE LADY COMES TO LOVE ANATOL, IT'S ALL THANKS TO OUR KITCHEN.
OURSE!


OF COU

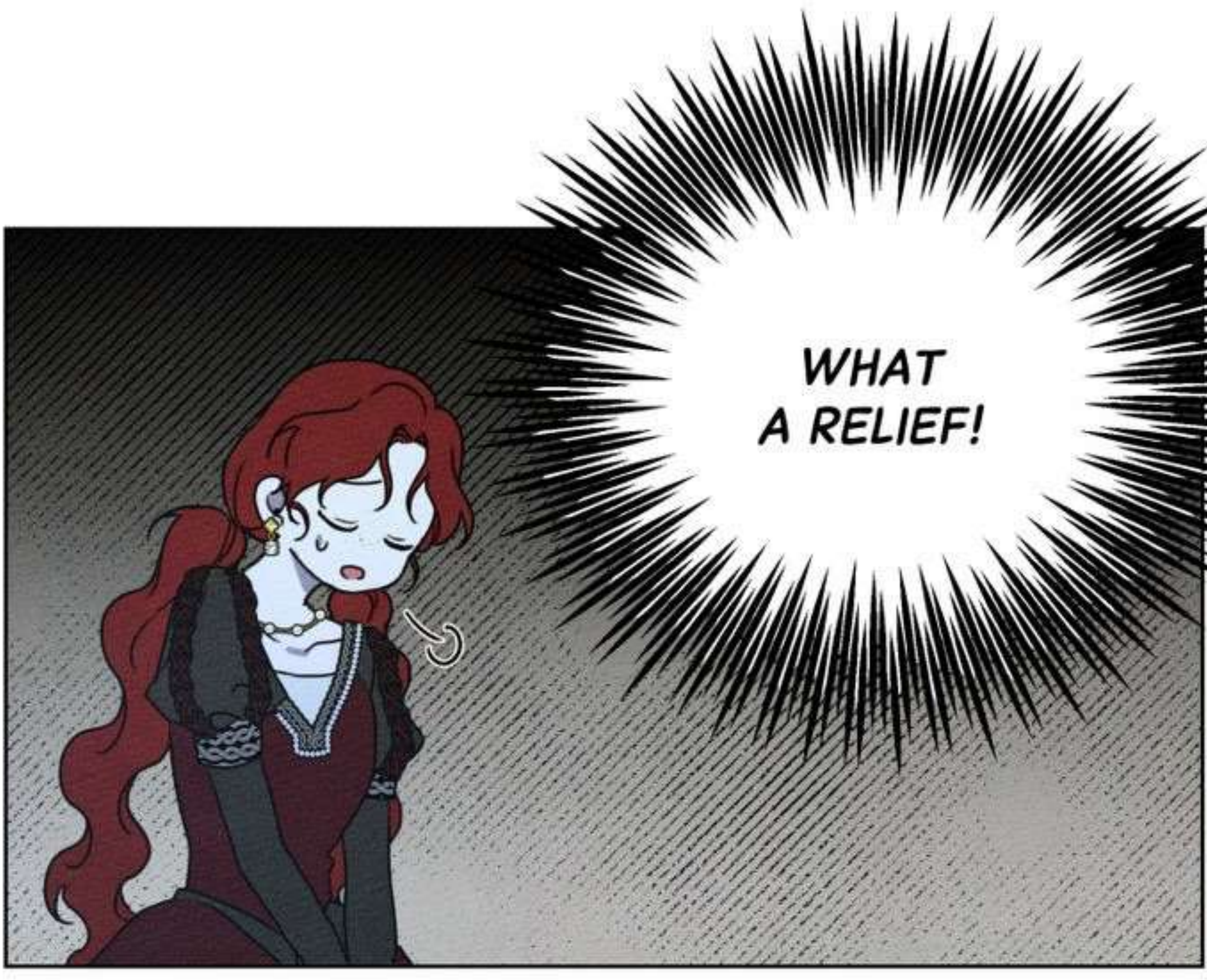
I WAS KIND OF WORRIED WE'D END UP SERVING SOMEONE DEMANDING...
WE REALLY CAN'T TRUST RUMORS.
I HAVEN'T SEEN HER MUCH, BUT SHE SEEMS NICE.
ALL RIGHT, ENOUGH CHITCHAT. LET'S GET BACK TO WORK.

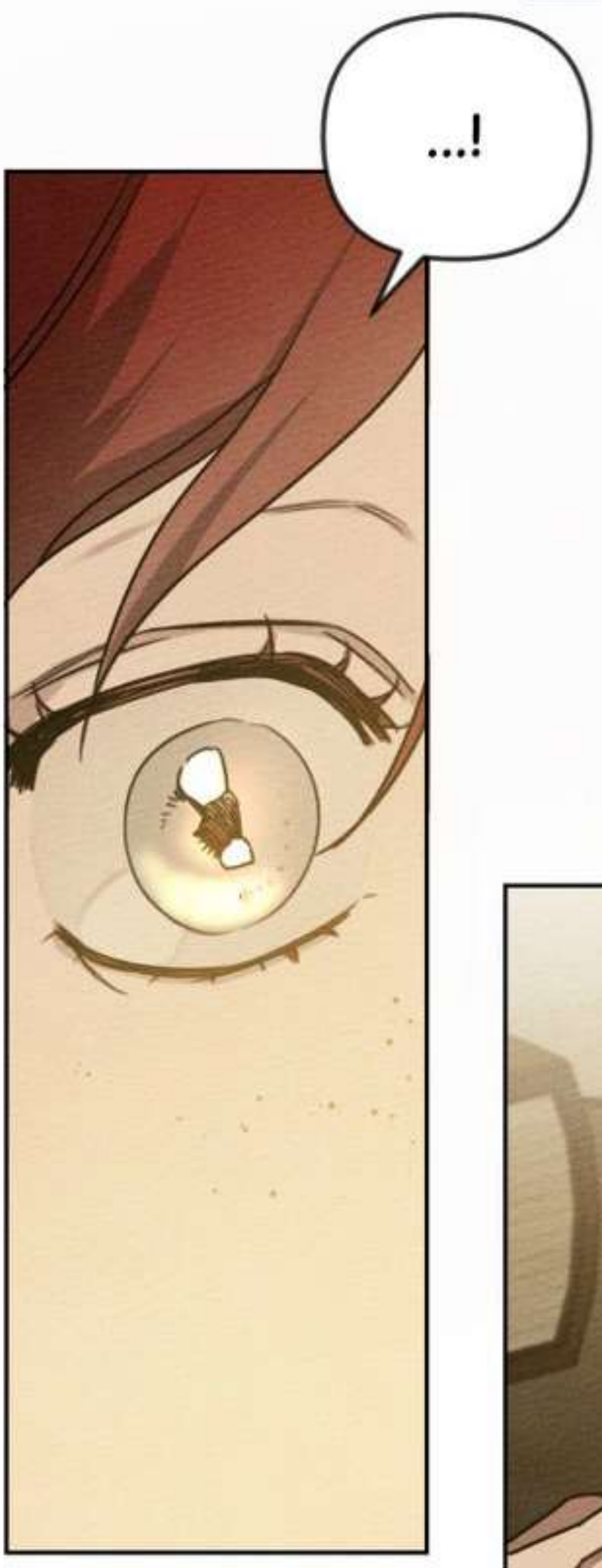

DID I MESS UP AGAIN?

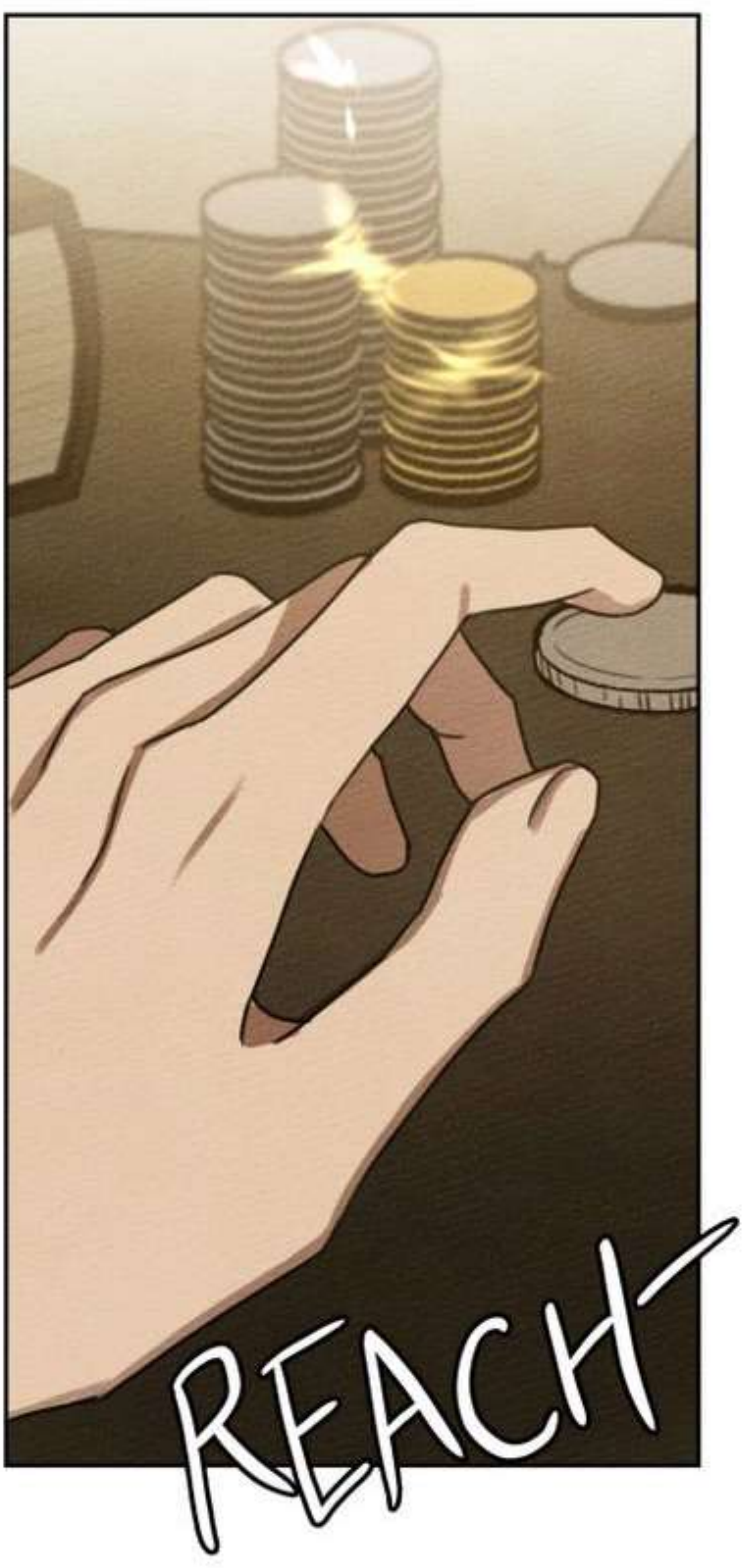
FLOP—


I THINK THIS SHOULD DO.

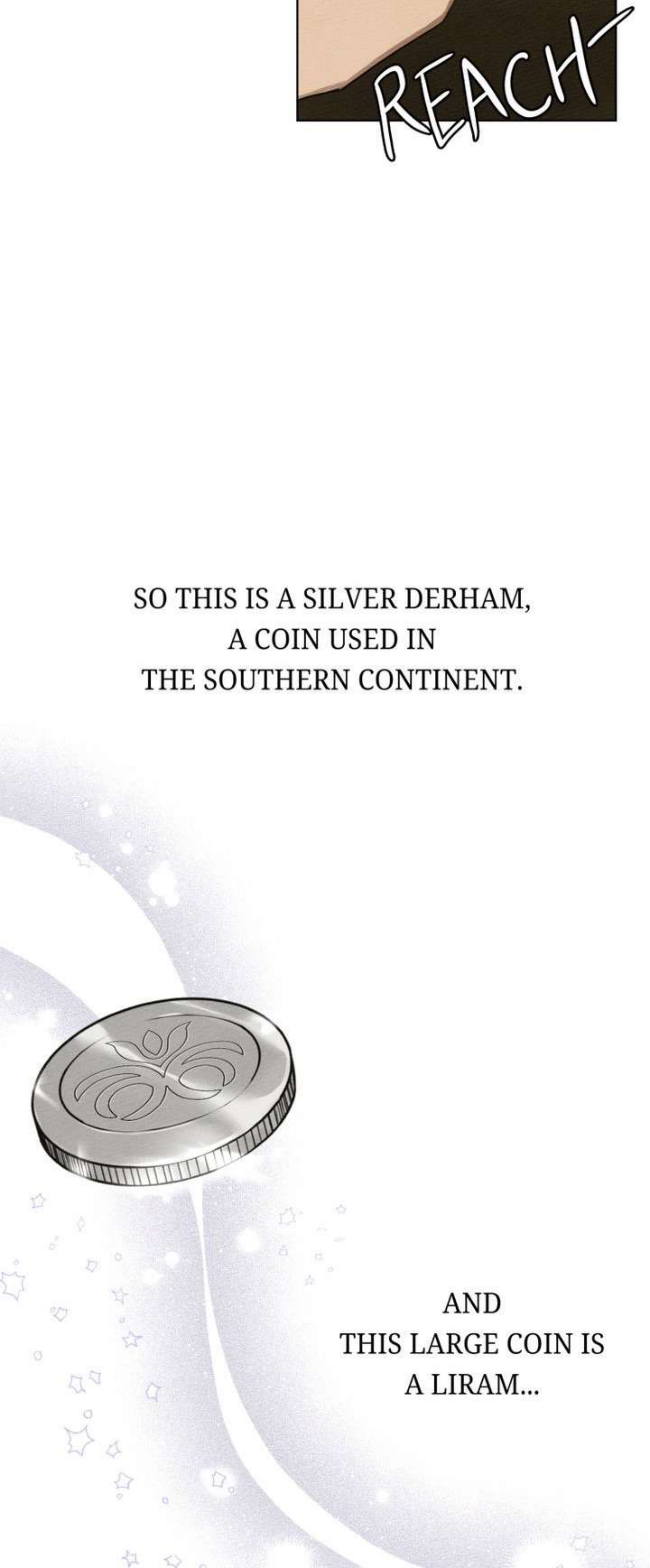
I DIDN'T FIND ANY MISTAKES.


WHAT A RELIEF!



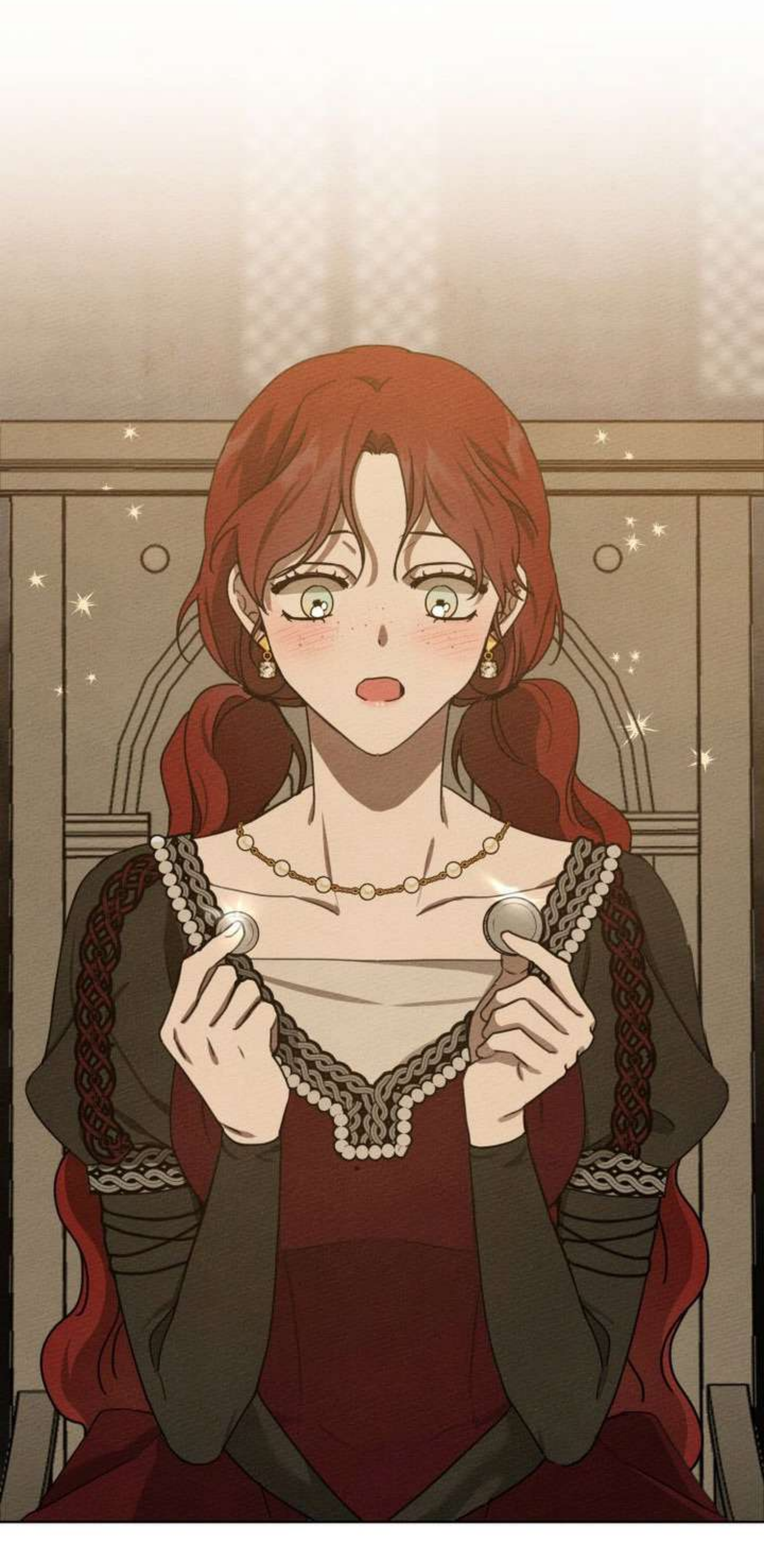


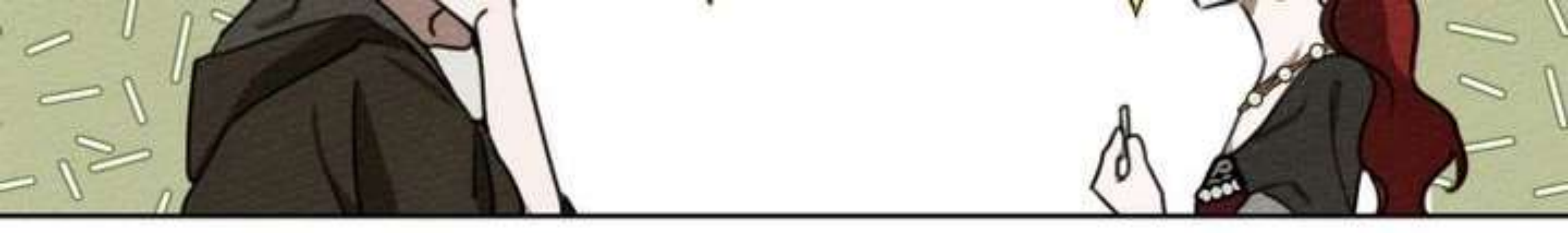
SO THIS IS A SILVER DERHAM,
A COIN USED IN
THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT.

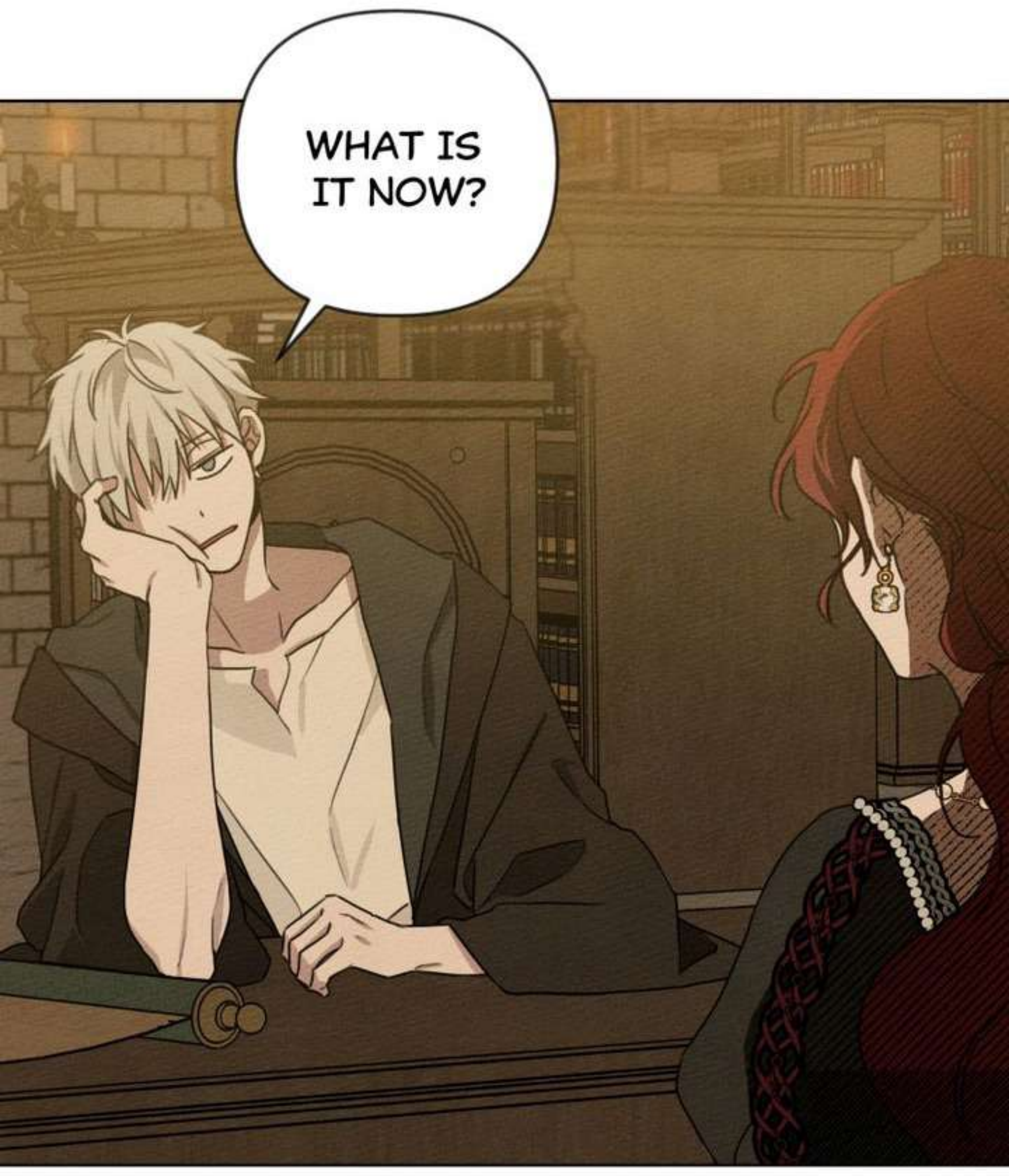


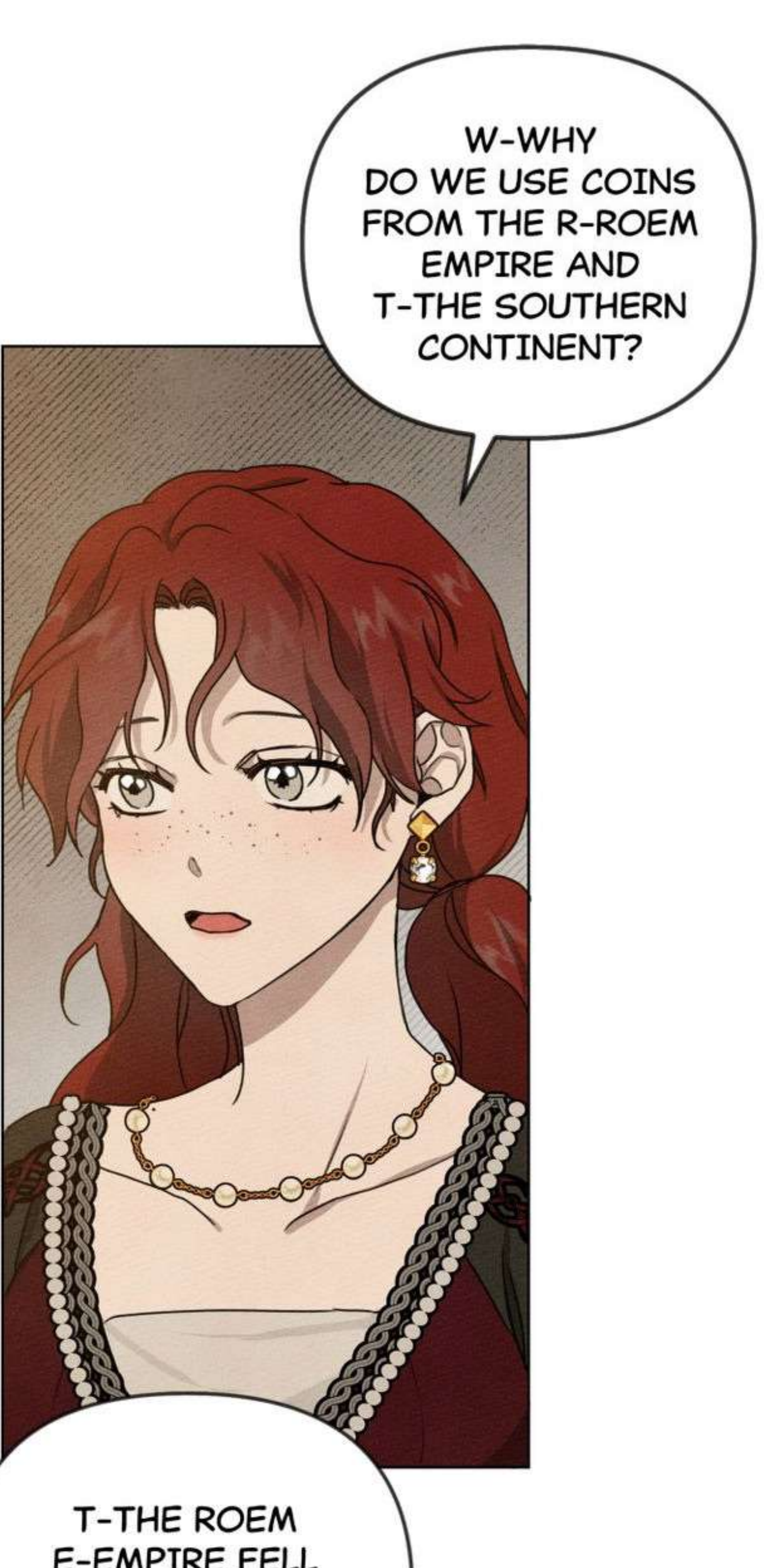
AND
THIS LARGE COIN IS
A LIRAM...

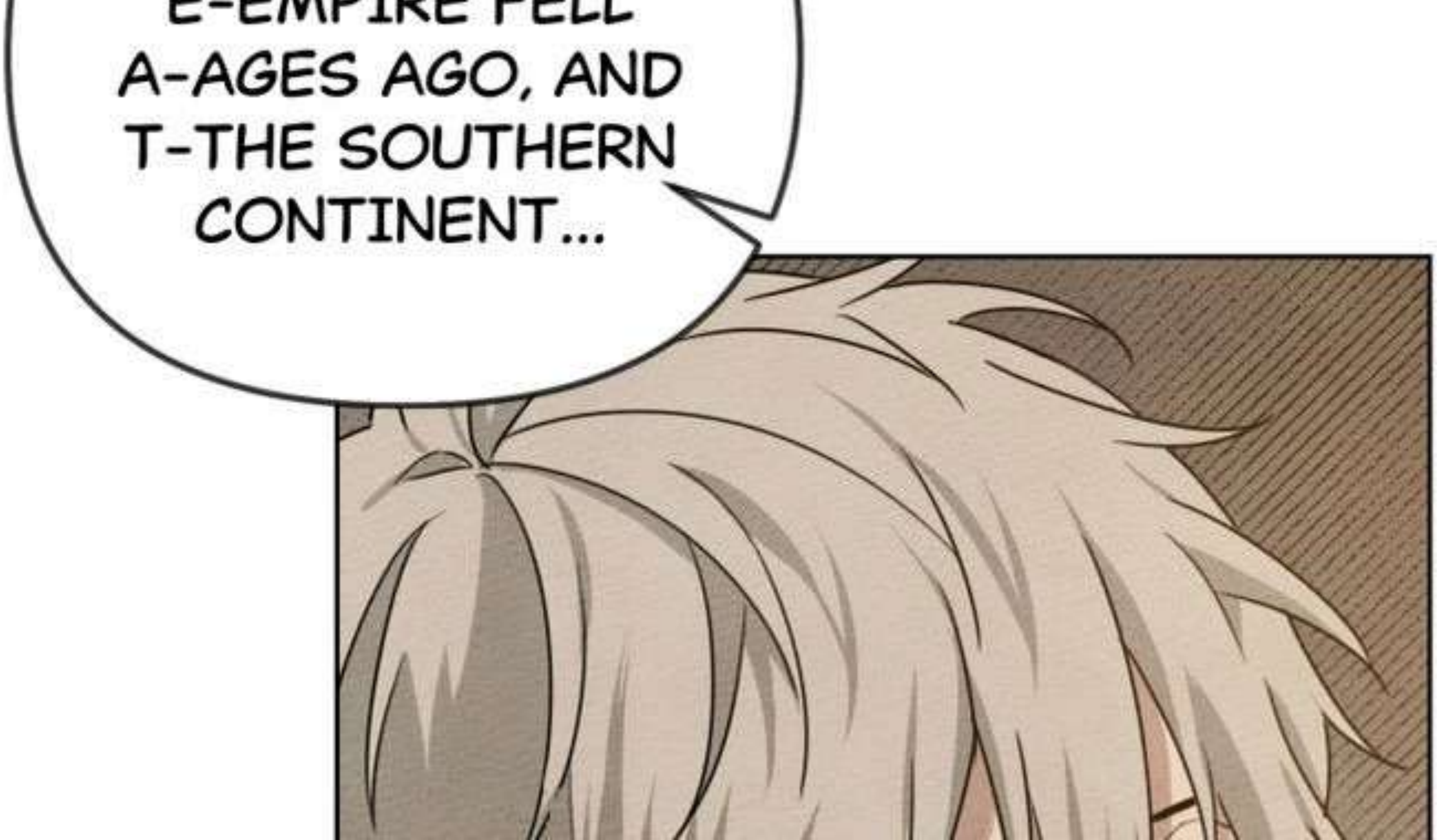
THEY DIFFER
SO MUCH IN SIZE.





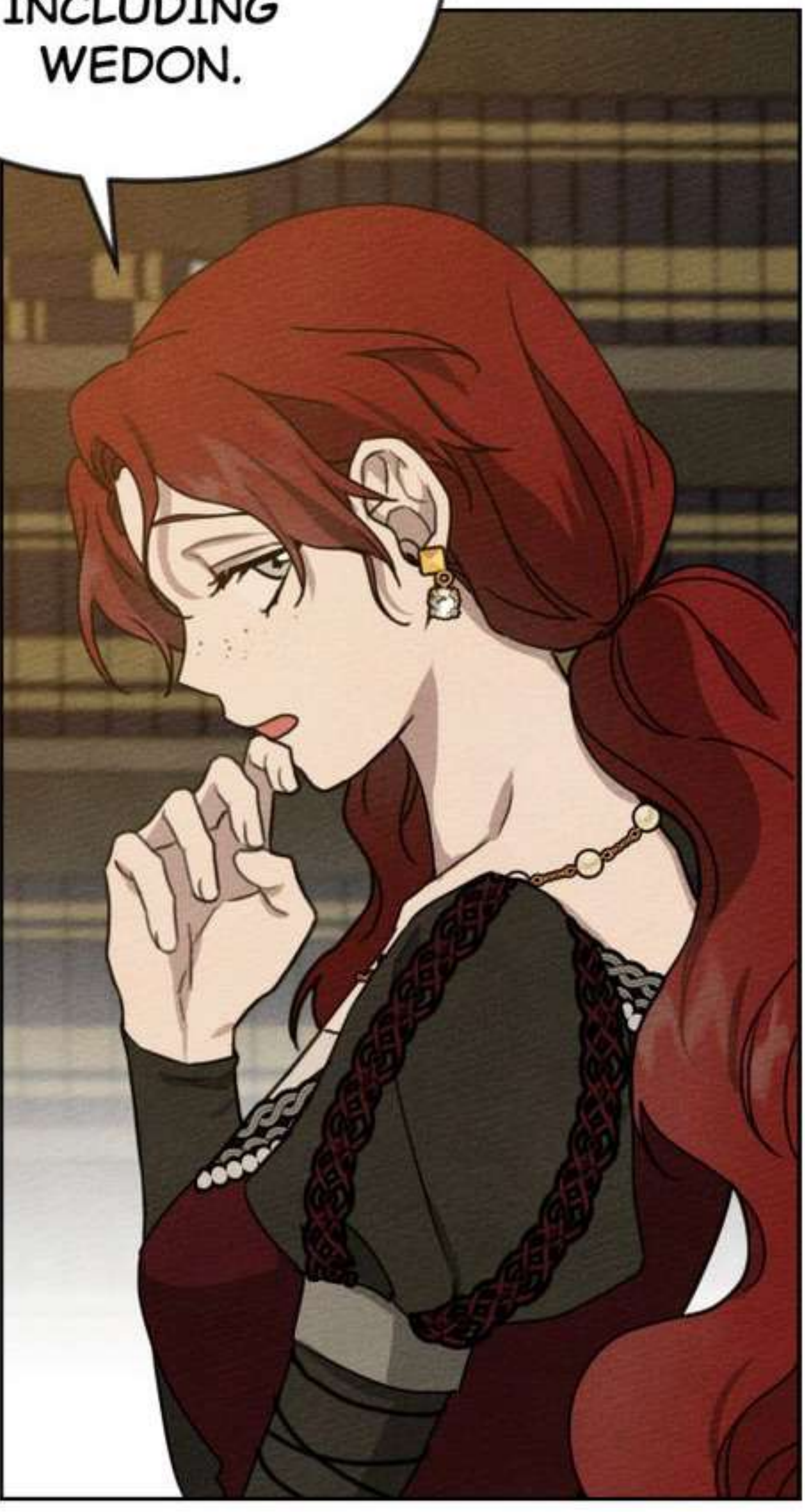

WHAT IS IT NOW?

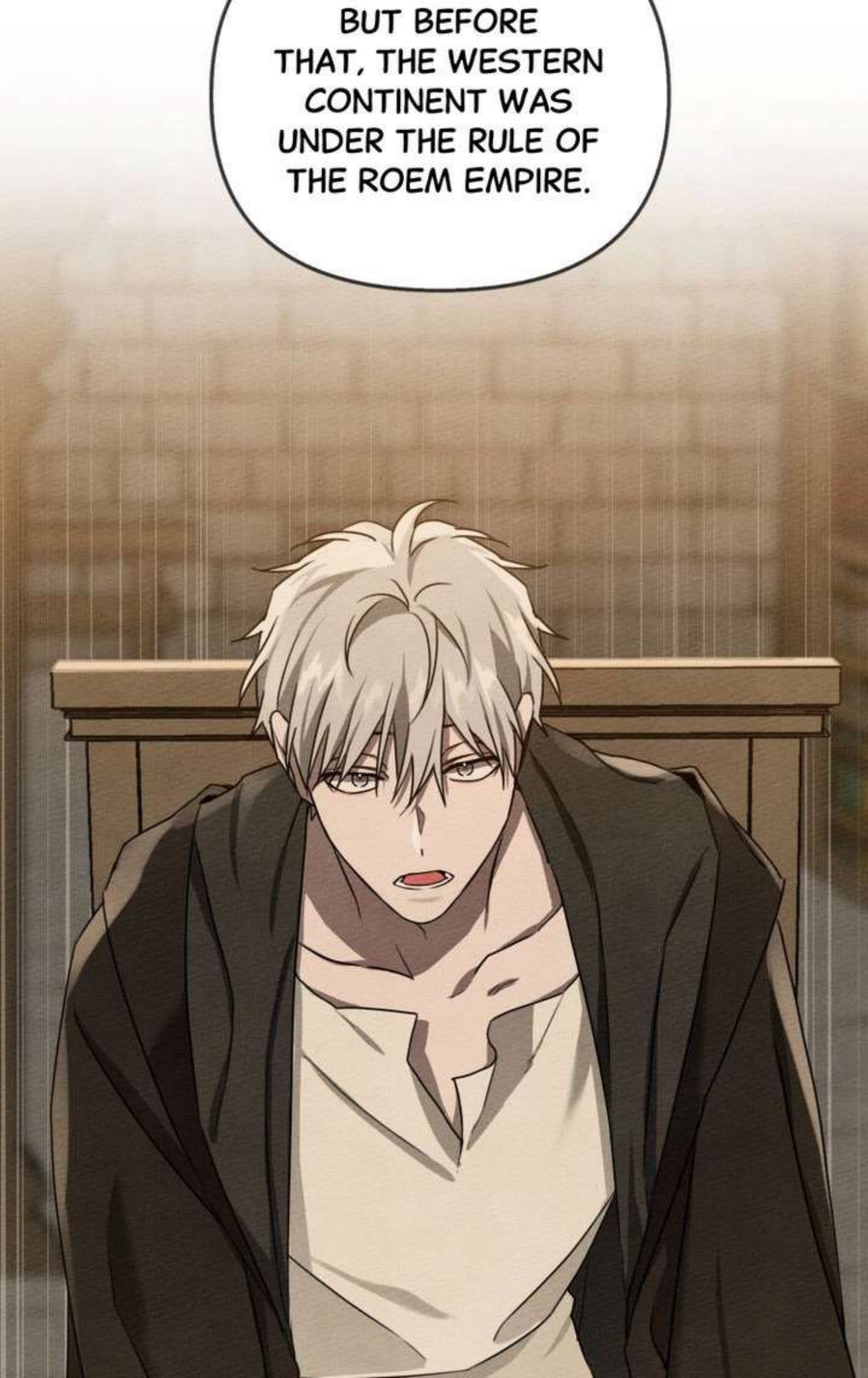

W-WHY DO WE USE COINS FROM THE R-ROEM EMPIRE AND T-THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT?


T-THE ROEM E-EMPIRE FELL A-AGES AGO, AND T-THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT...

I NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D ASK THIS QUESTION...

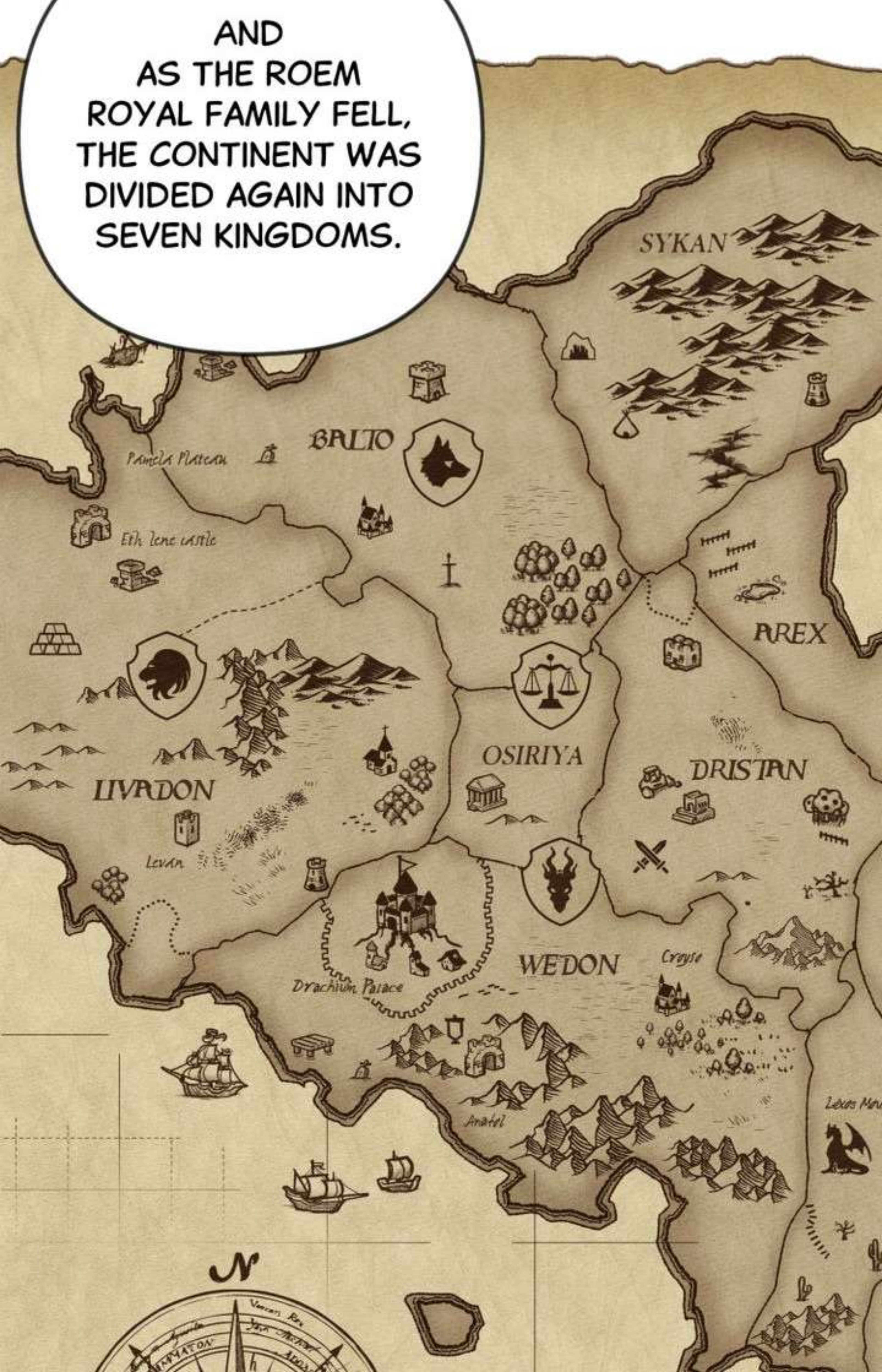
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE WESTERN CONTINENT?


UM... I-I KNOW IT C-CONSISTS OF THE SEVEN KINGDOMS, INCLUDING WEDON.

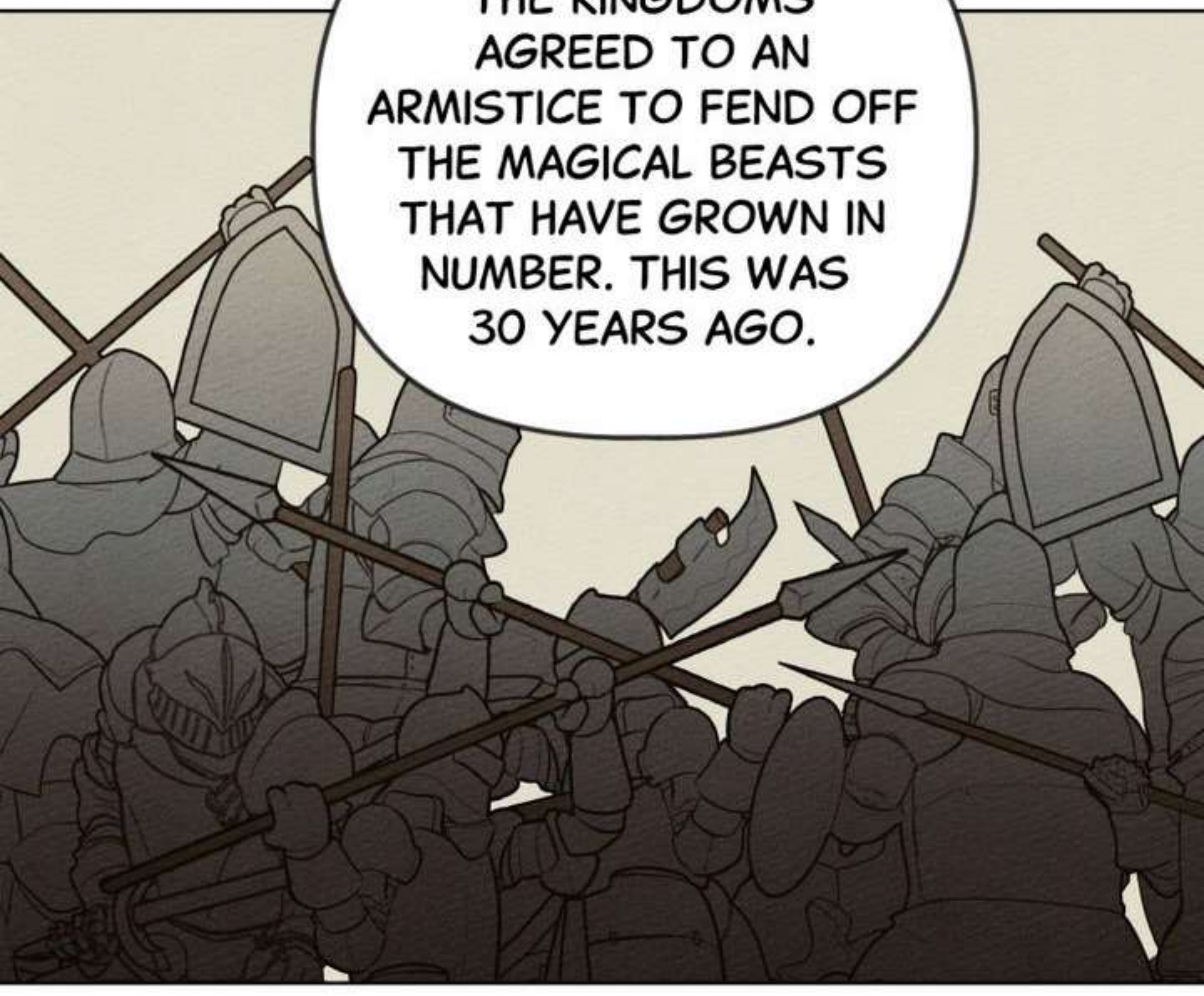

BUT BEFORE THAT, THE WESTERN CONTINENT WAS UNDER THE RULE OF THE ROEM EMPIRE.

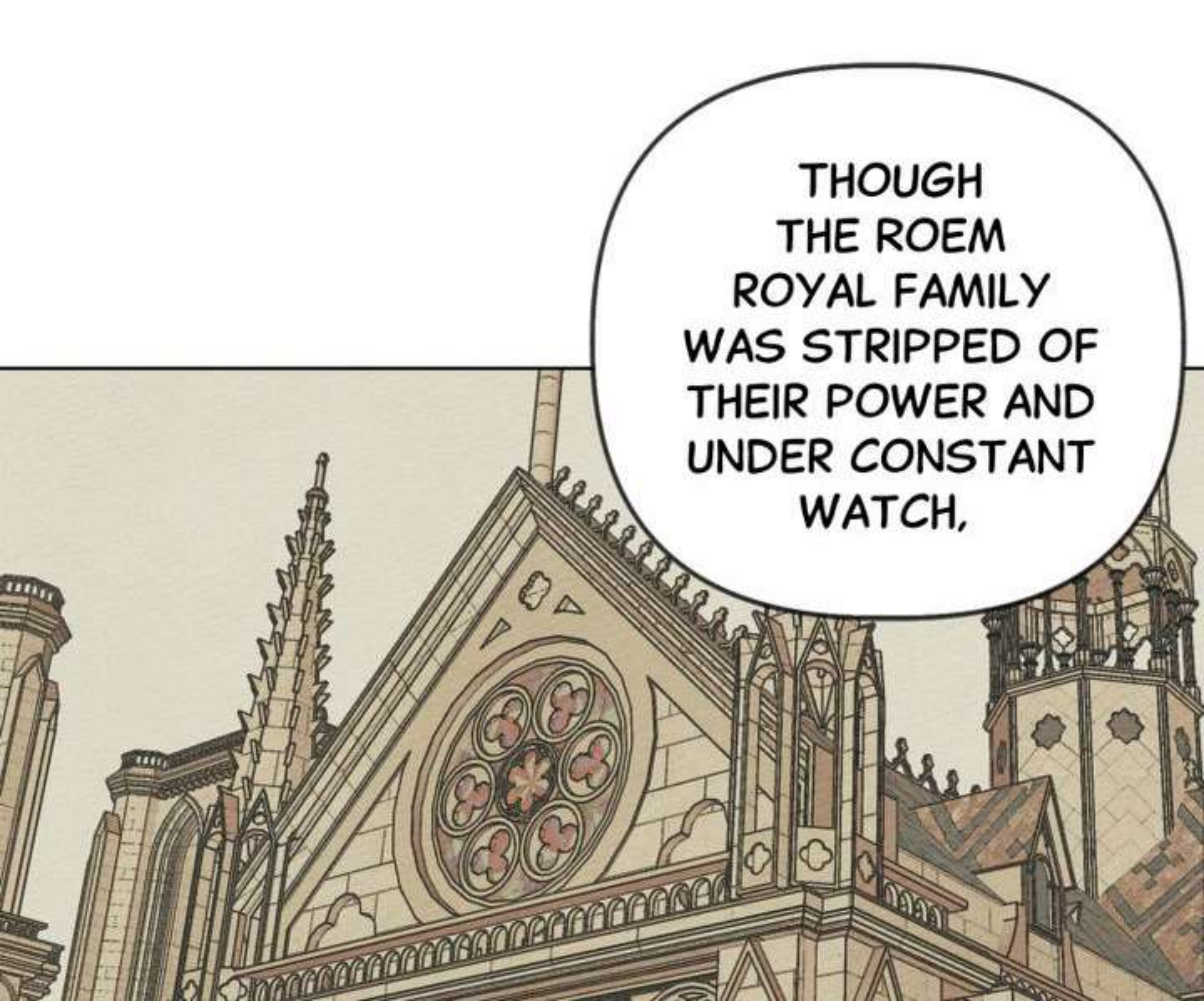
BEFORE THE EMPIRE, THE CONTINENT WAS DIVIDED INTO TEN KINGDOMS.

THEN DARIAN THE MONARCH AND TEN HEROES FROM EACH KINGDOM UNIFIED THE WHOLE CONTINENT TO FOUND THE EMPIRE.


AND AS THE ROEM ROYAL FAMILY FELL, THE CONTINENT WAS DIVIDED AGAIN INTO SEVEN KINGDOMS.
SYKAN
BALTO
Pamela Plateau
Eth lene castle
AREX
OSIRIYA
DRISTAN
LIVADON
Levan
WEDON
Crysle
Drachium Palace
Anatel
Lebos Mo
N

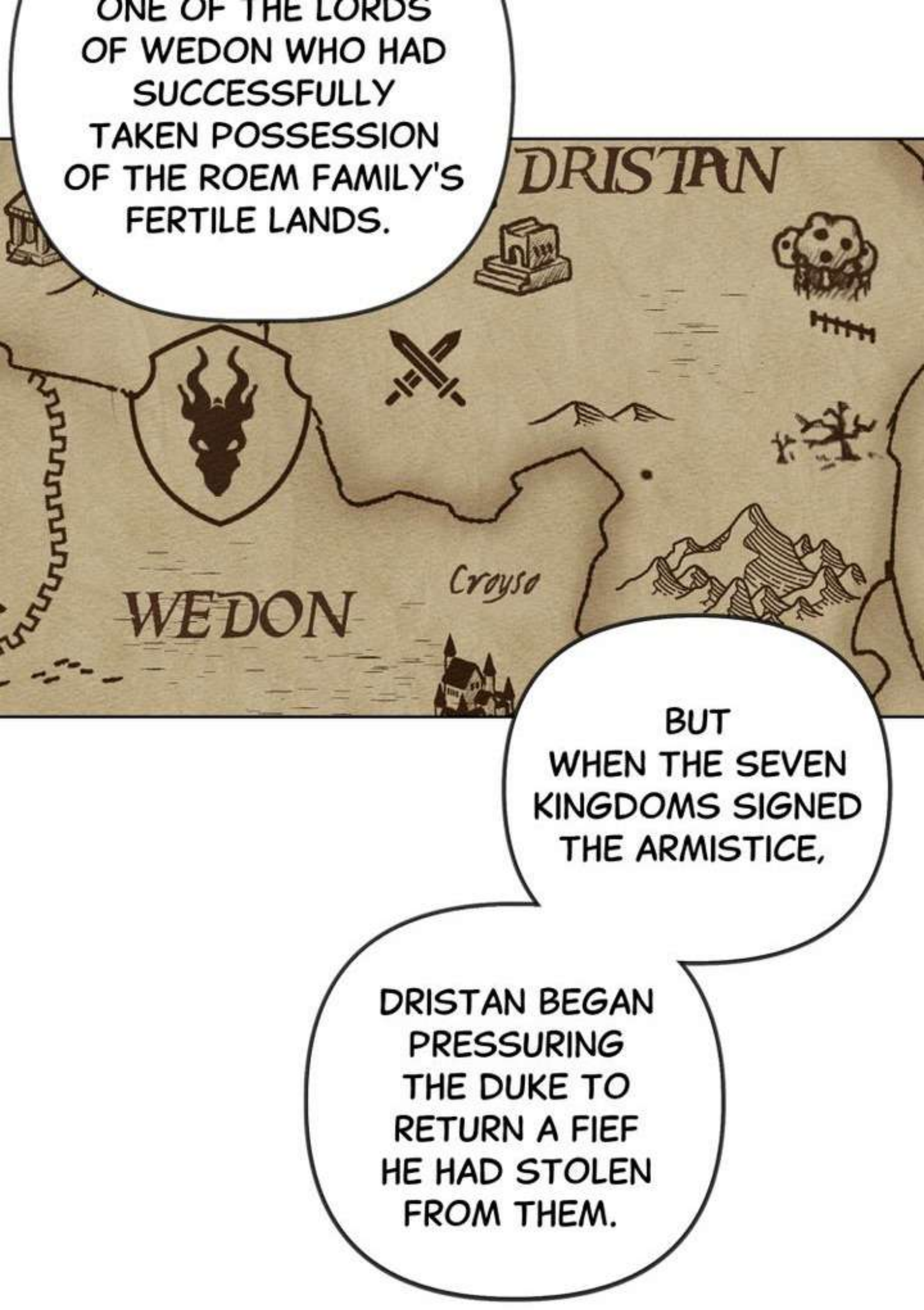
W
E
S
WEDON IS ONE OF THESE KINGDOMS.
WEDON
Anatol

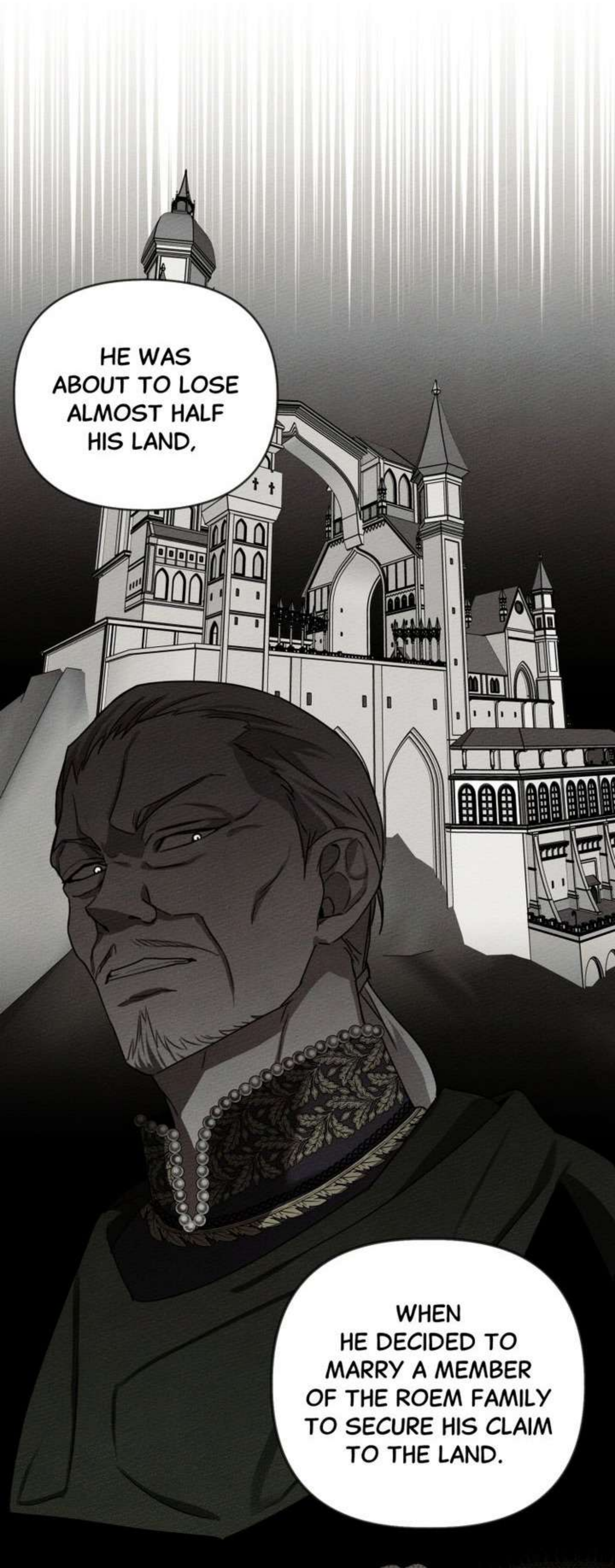

THE KINGS AND FEUDAL LORDS ALIKE WAGED COUNTLESS WARS TO PROTECT AND INCREASE THEIR TERRITORY.
THEN THE KINGDOMS AGREED TO AN ARMISTICE TO FEND OFF THE MAGICAL BEASTS THAT HAVE GROWN IN NUMBER. THIS WAS 30 YEARS AGO.

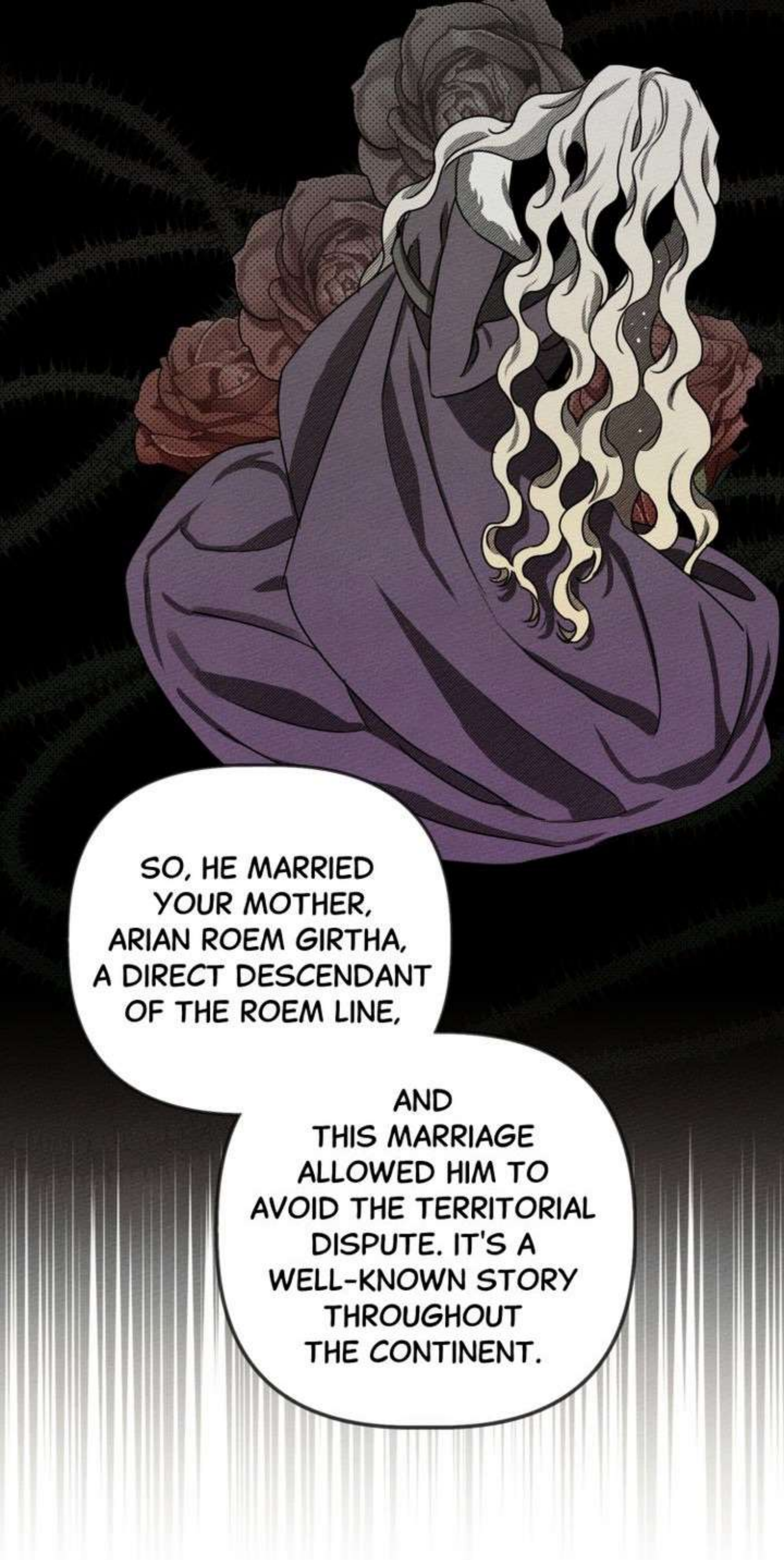

THOUGH THE ROEM ROYAL FAMILY WAS STRIPPED OF THEIR POWER AND UNDER CONSTANT WATCH,

WE STILL USE THEIR CURRENCY BECAUSE THEY WERE ONCE AN IMPERIAL POWER.

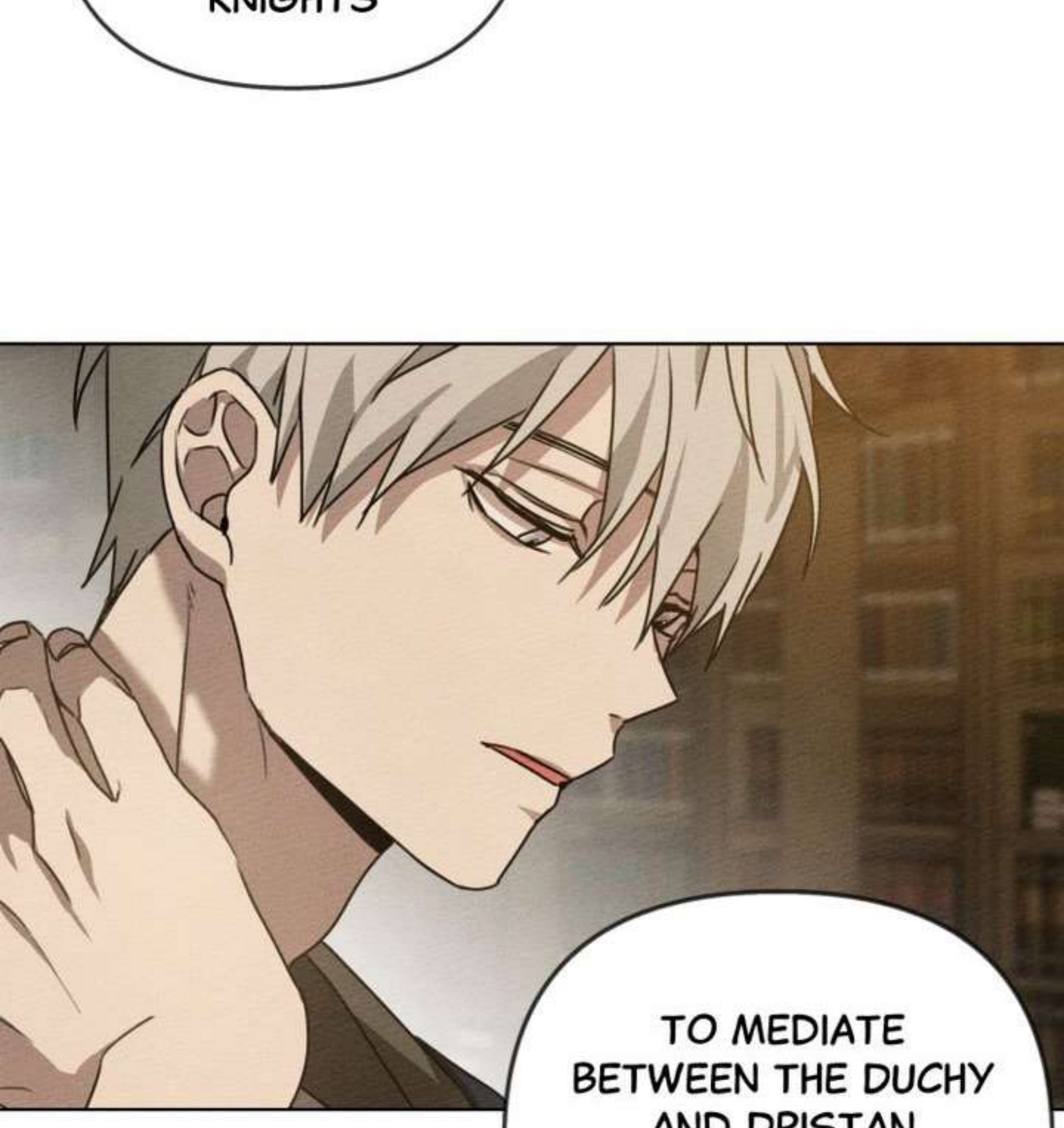
AND THE PERSON WHO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THIS...
IS THE DUKE CROYSO.
THE DUKE WAS

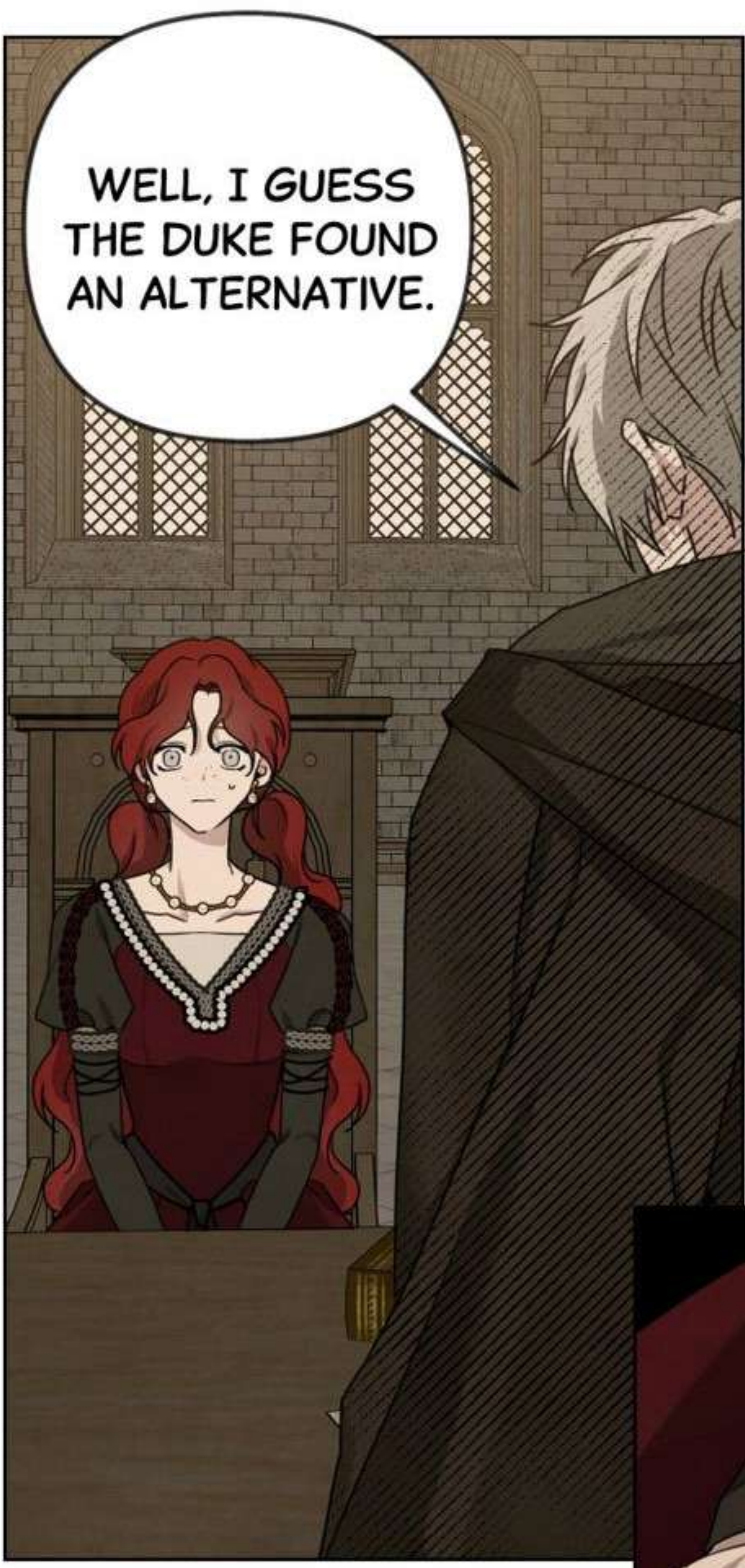

ONE OF THE LORDS OF WEDON WHO HAD SUCCESSFULLY TAKEN POSSESSION OF THE ROEM FAMILY'S FERTILE LANDS.
DRISTAN
WEDON
Croyso
BUT WHEN THE SEVEN KINGDOMS SIGNED THE ARMISTICE,
DRISTAN BEGAN PRESSURING THE DUKE TO RETURN A FIEF HE HAD STOLEN FROM THEM.

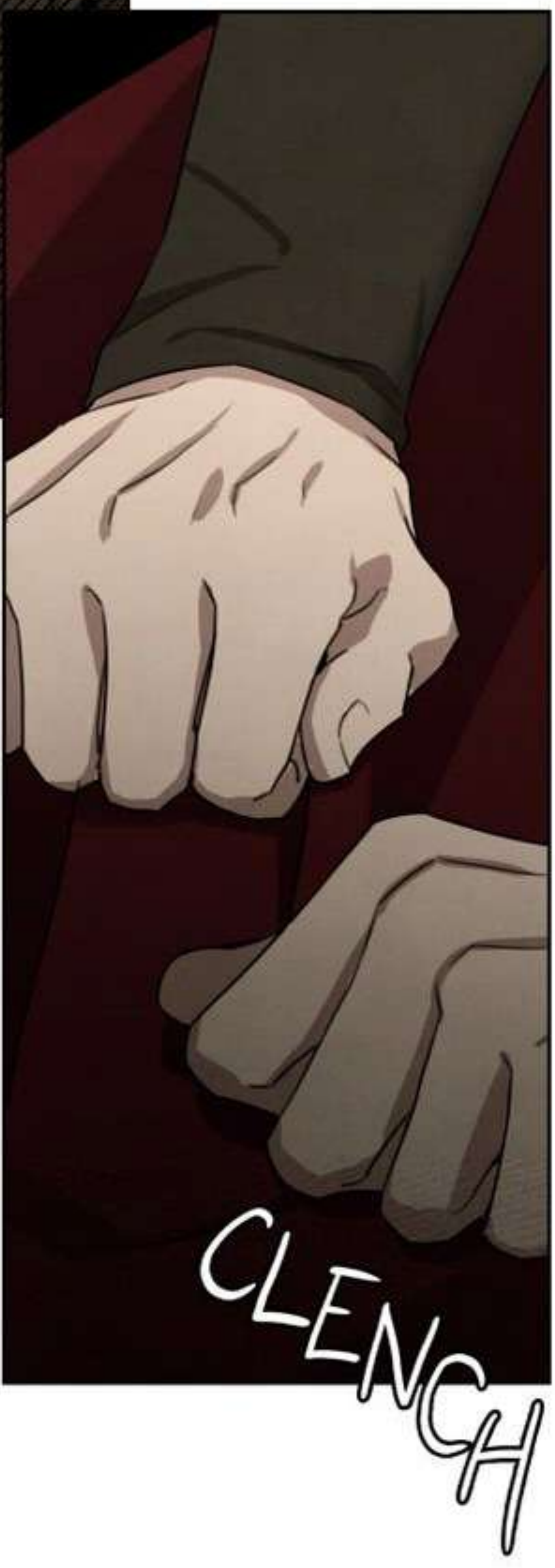

HE WAS ABOUT TO LOSE ALMOST HALF HIS LAND,
WHEN HE DECIDED TO MARRY A MEMBER OF THE ROEM FAMILY TO SECURE HIS CLAIM TO THE LAND.


SO, HE MARRIED YOUR MOTHER, ARIAN ROEM GIRTHA, A DIRECT DESCENDANT OF THE ROEM LINE,
AND THIS MARRIAGE ALLOWED HIM TO AVOID THE TERRITORIAL DISPUTE. IT'S A WELL-KNOWN STORY THROUGHOUT THE CONTINENT.

ANYWAY, THAT EXPLAINS WHY THE KING ORDERED THE REMDRAGON KNIGHTS


TO MEDIATE BETWEEN THE DUCHY AND DRISTAN A FEW YEARS AGO. IT WAS QUITE A PAIN IN THE NECK.

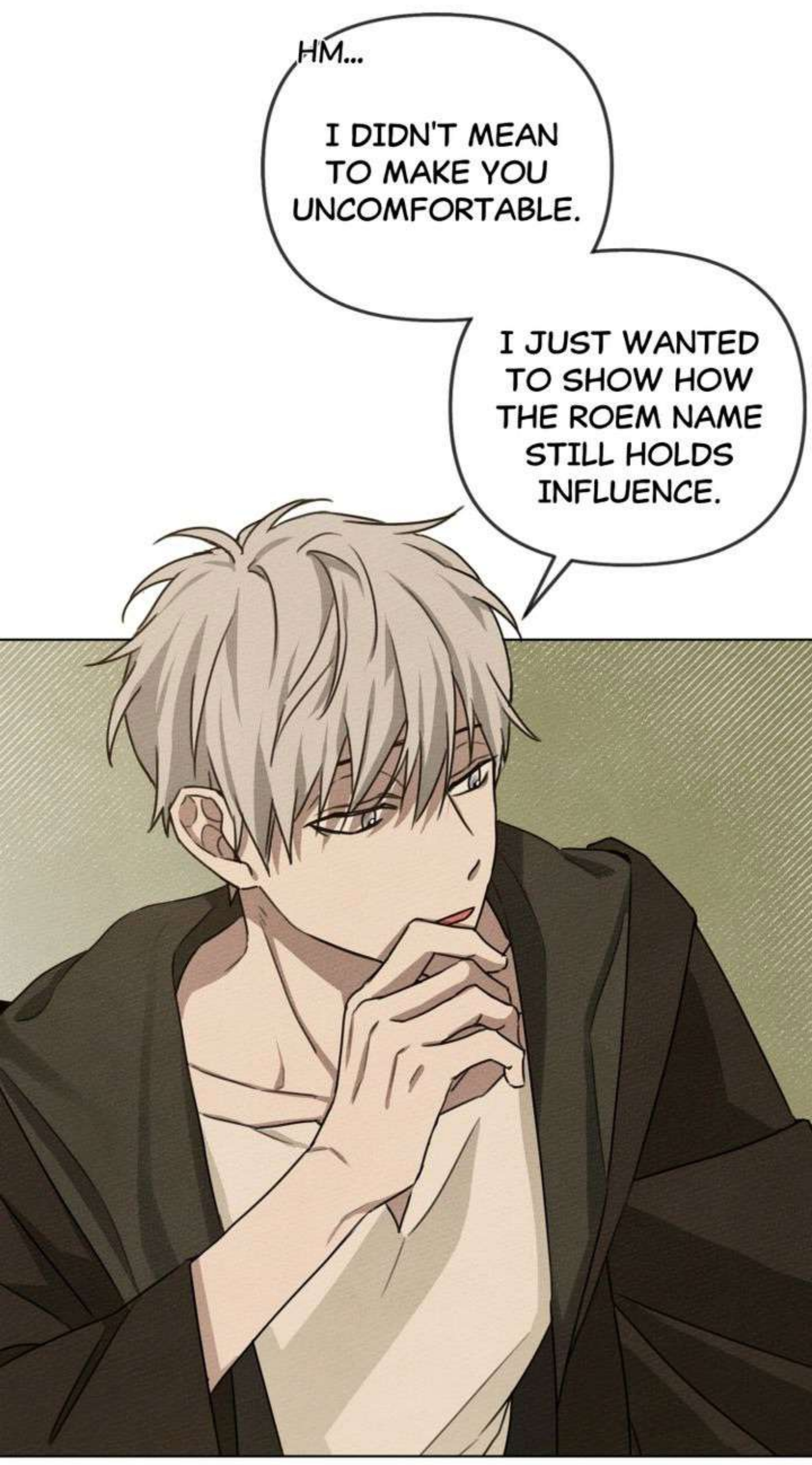

WELL, I GUESS THE DUKE FOUND AN ALTERNATIVE.

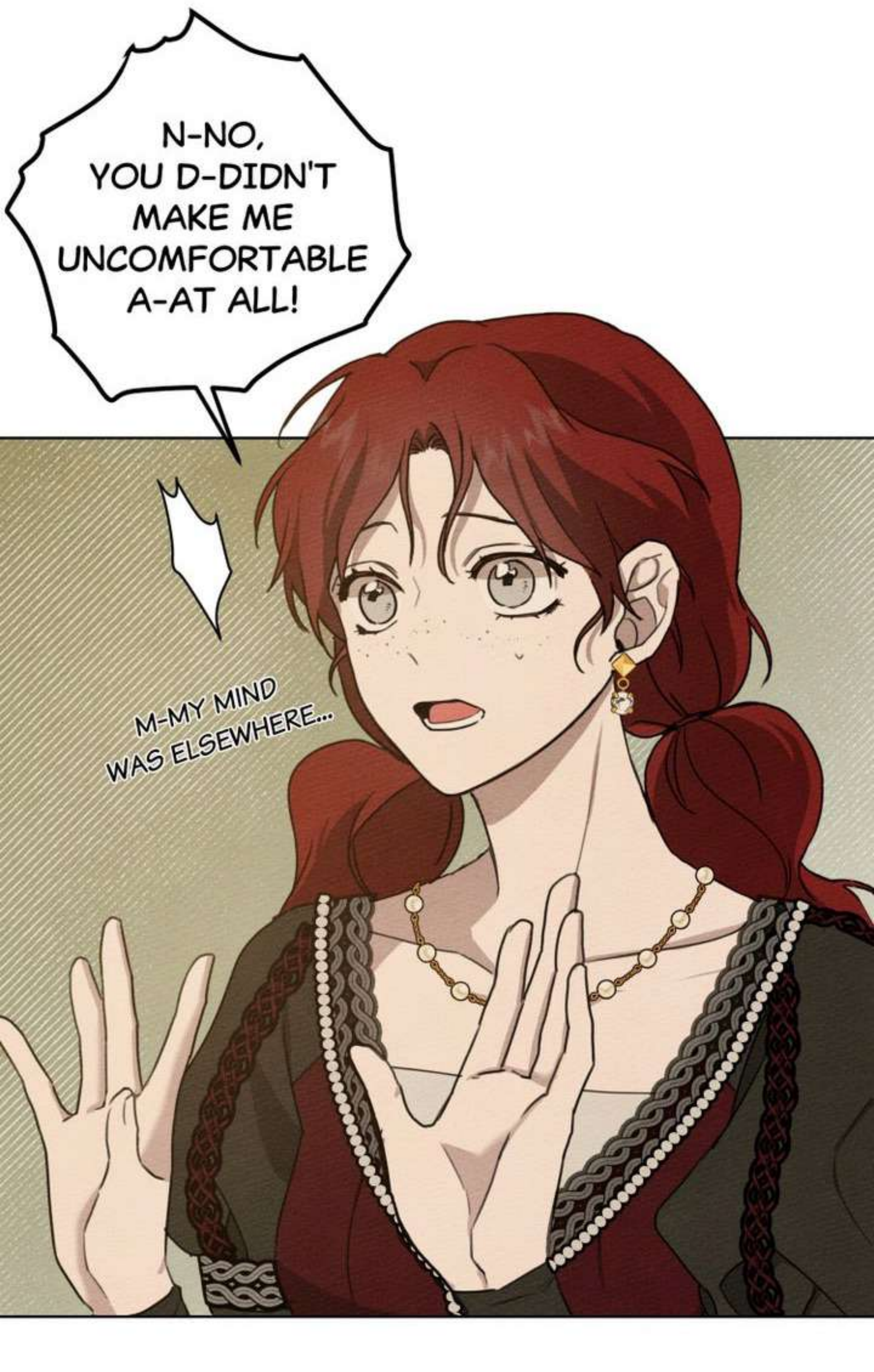


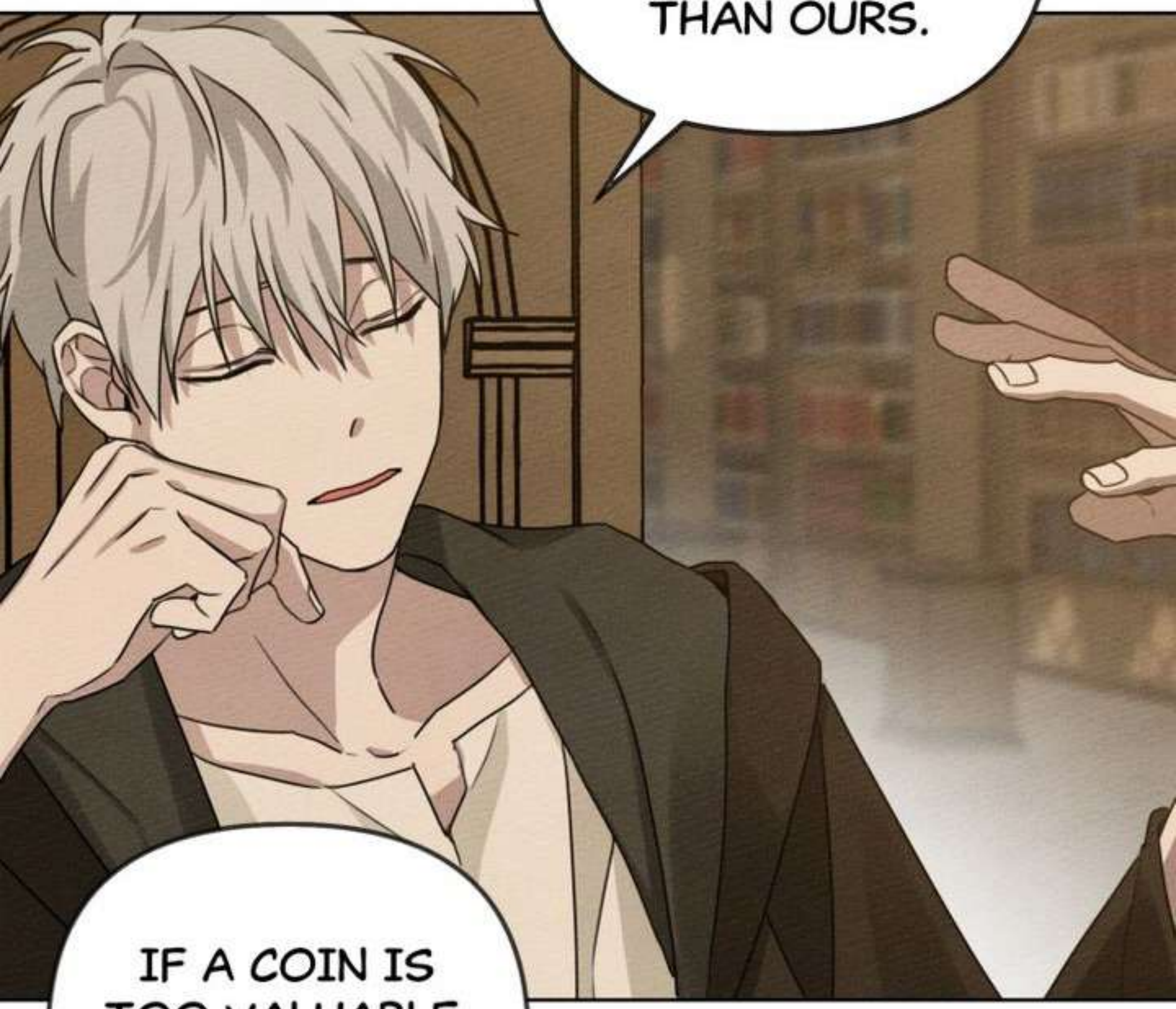
RUTH DIDN'T SAY IT,
BUT I UNDERSTOOD WHAT HE MEANT.

ROSETTA'S ENGAGEMENT
TO THE ROYAL FAMILY.

FATHER HAD BECOME STRICTER ON ME SINCE THEN
BECAUSE HE WAS WORRIED I'D HINDER HER...

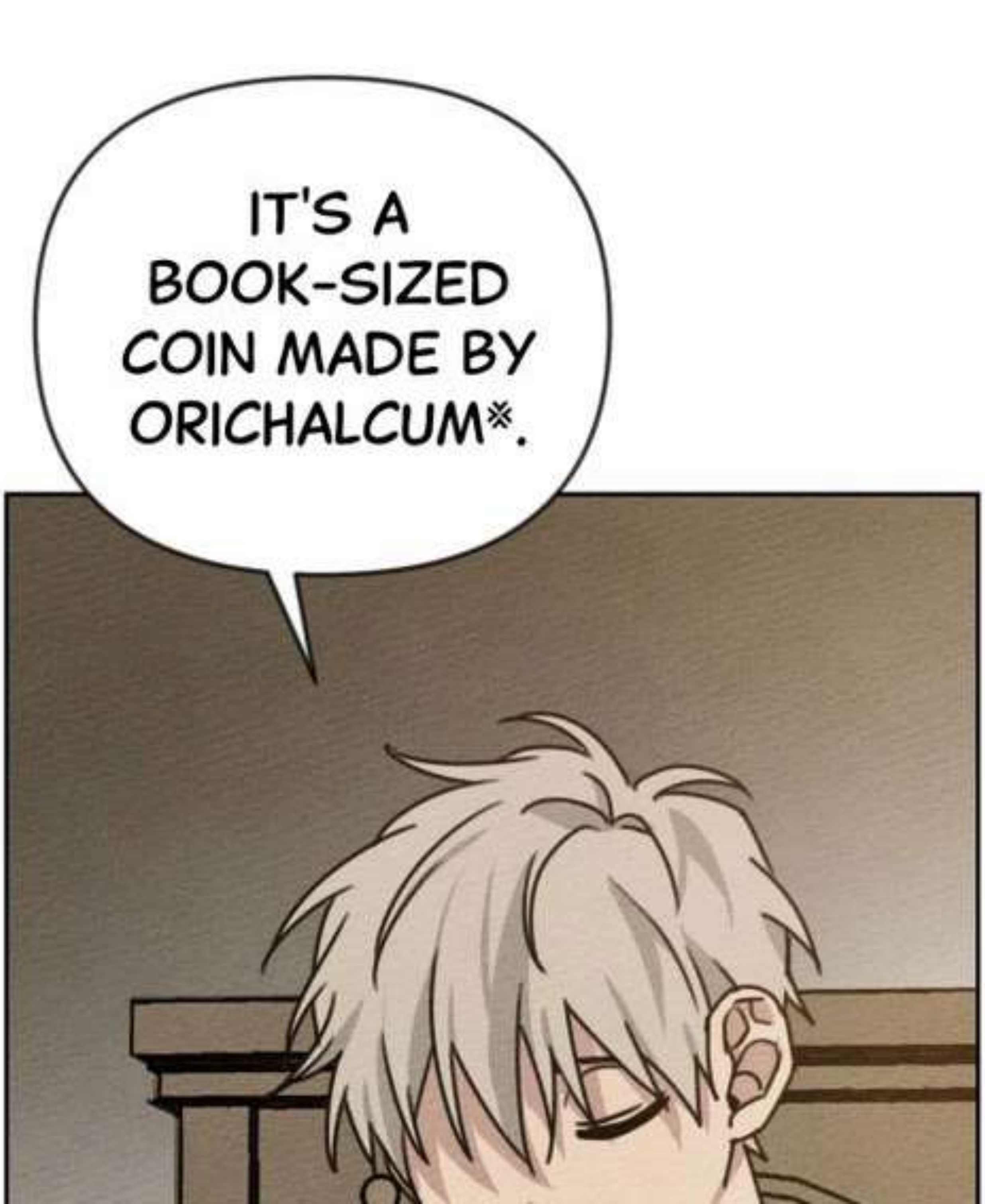

HM...
I DIDN'T MEAN TO MAKE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE.
I JUST WANTED TO SHOW HOW THE ROEM NAME STILL HOLDS INFLUENCE.


N-NO, YOU D-DIDN'T MAKE ME UNCOMFORTABLE A-AT ALL!
M-MY MIND WAS ELSEWHERE...

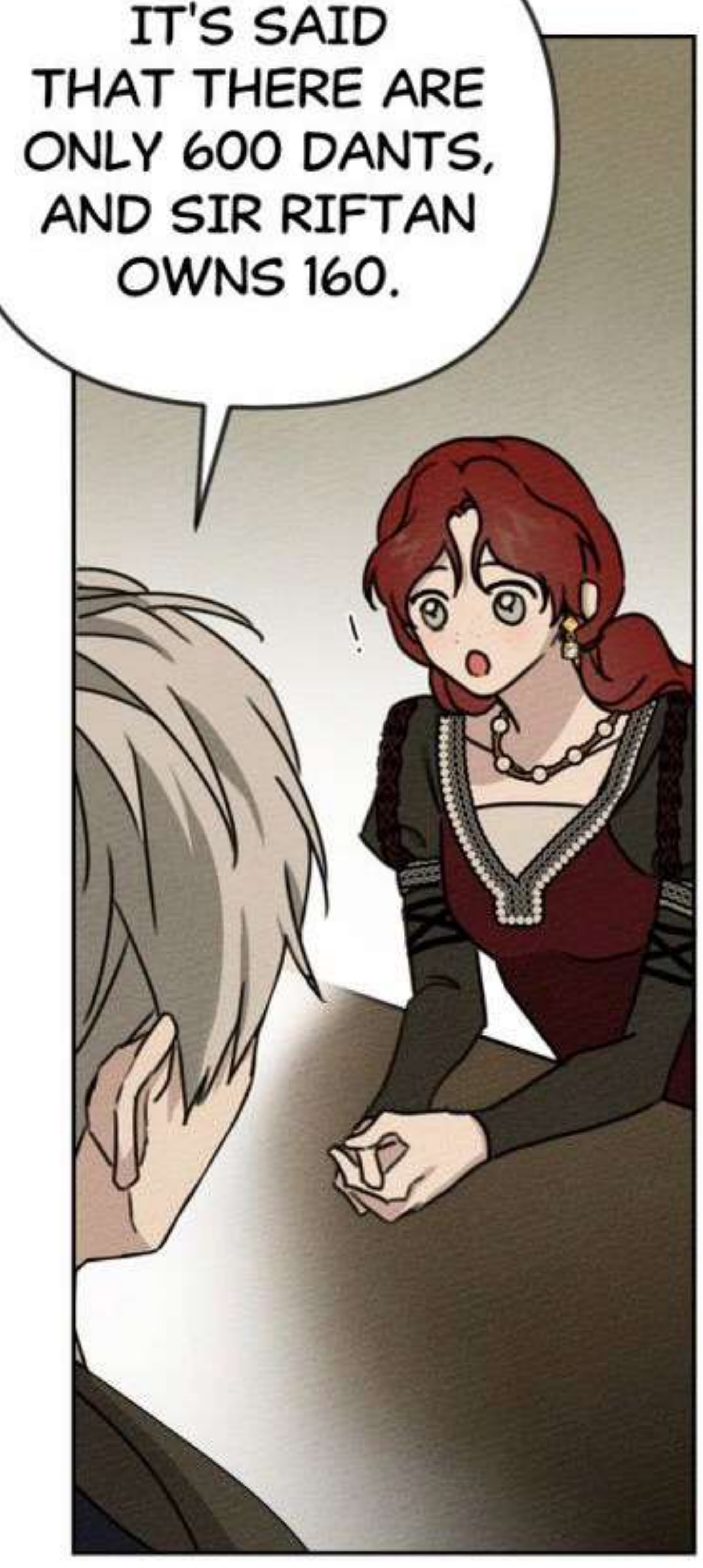

WH-WHAT ABOUT THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT'S C-CURRENCY?
WE USE IT BECAUSE THEIR COMMERCE IS MORE ADVANCED THAN OURS.
IF A COIN IS TOO VALUABLE, TRADE CAN GET TROUBLESOME.
WE CAN'T BREAK A COIN INTO TINY PIECES JUST FOR AN APPLE, CAN WE?

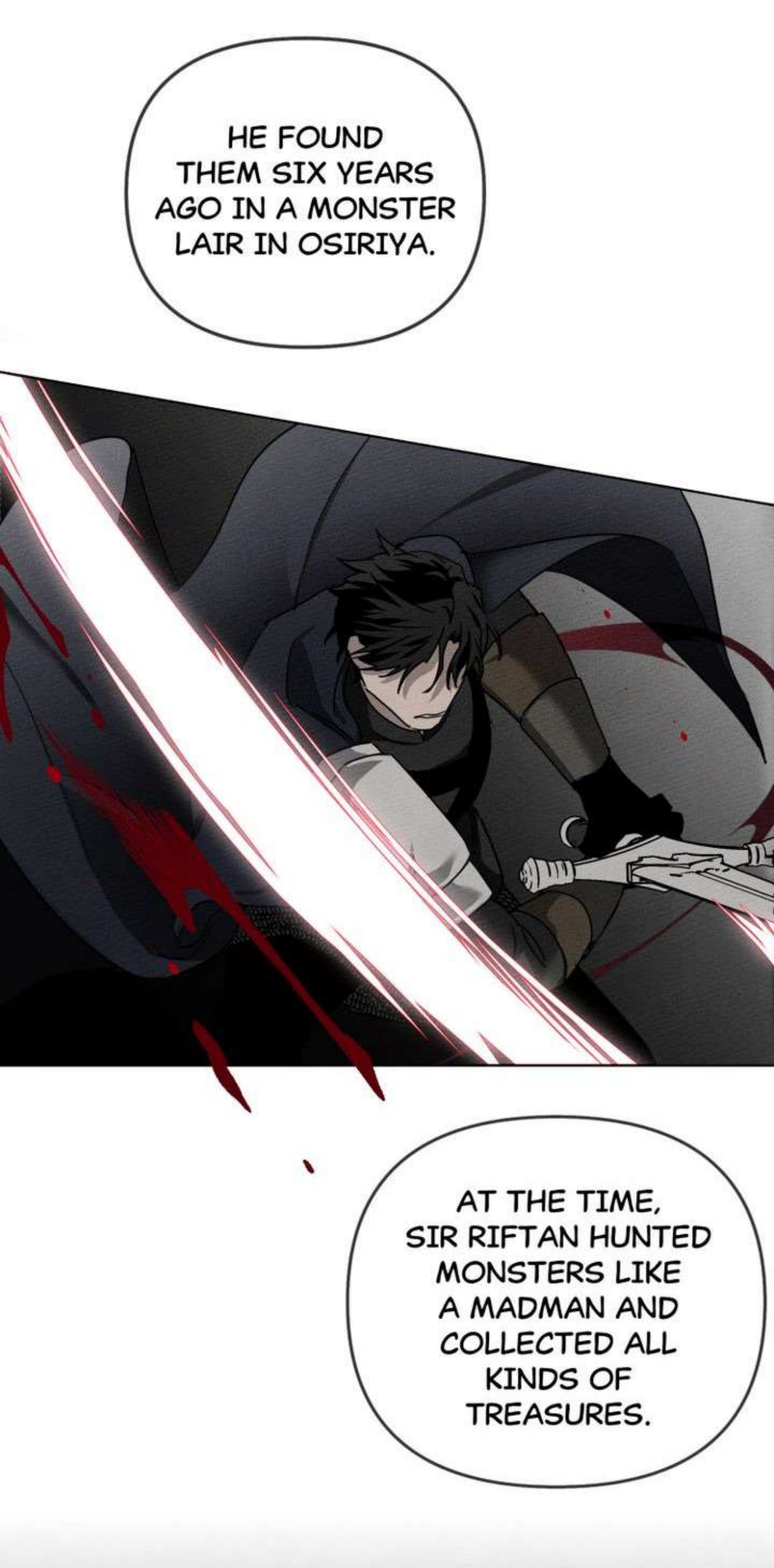
IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR YOU TO KNOW ABOUT BALTO AND SYKAN AS WELL. THEIR COINS ARE SIMILAR TO ROEM'S.
BALTO
WE'RE ESTABLISHING A TRADE ROUTE, SO WE CAN EXPECT MERCHANTS FROM THESE KINGDOMS TO ARRIVE IN ANATOL POSSIBLY BY NEXT

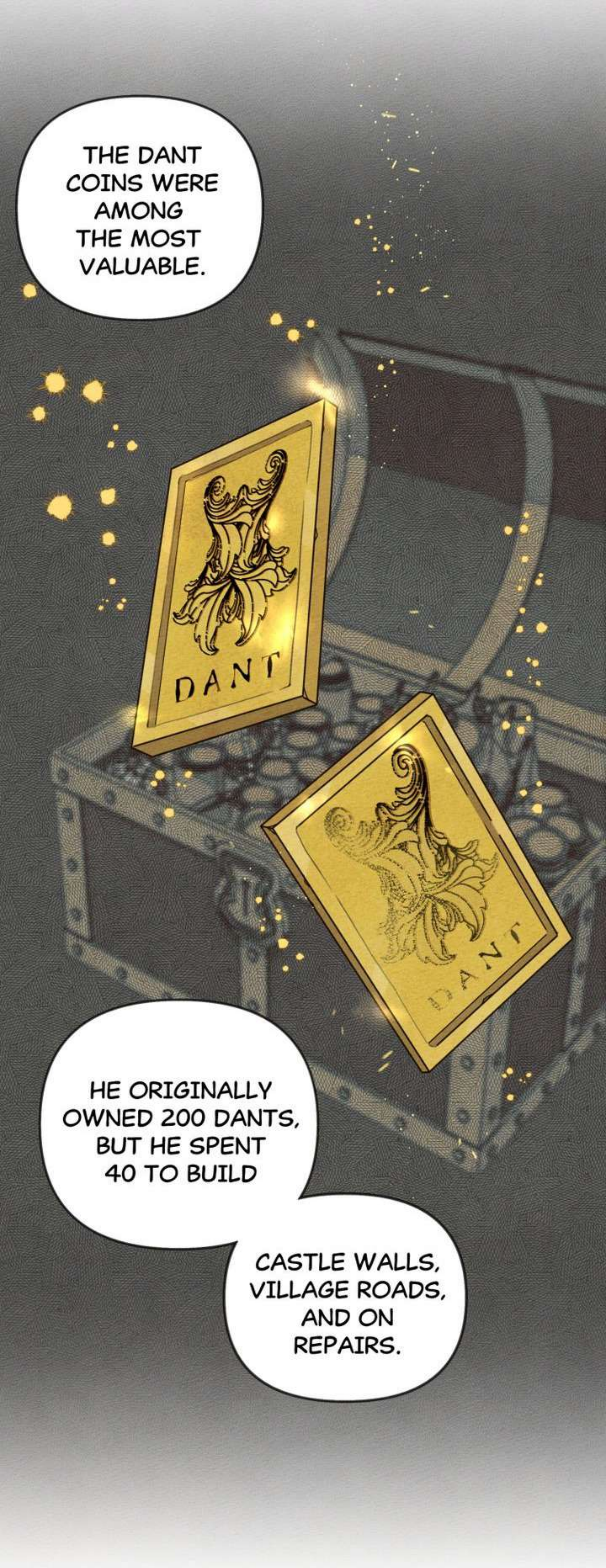
SPRING.
THERE'S ALSO SHEKEL, THE COPPER COINS USED BY COMMONERS, AND DANT, THE COINS USED ONLY BY THE ELITE.
YOU'LL PROBABLY BE FINE IF YOU REMEMBER THOSE.
ALSO NOTE THAT DANT IS THE ROEM CURRENCY WITH THE HIGHEST VALUE IN THE WORLD.

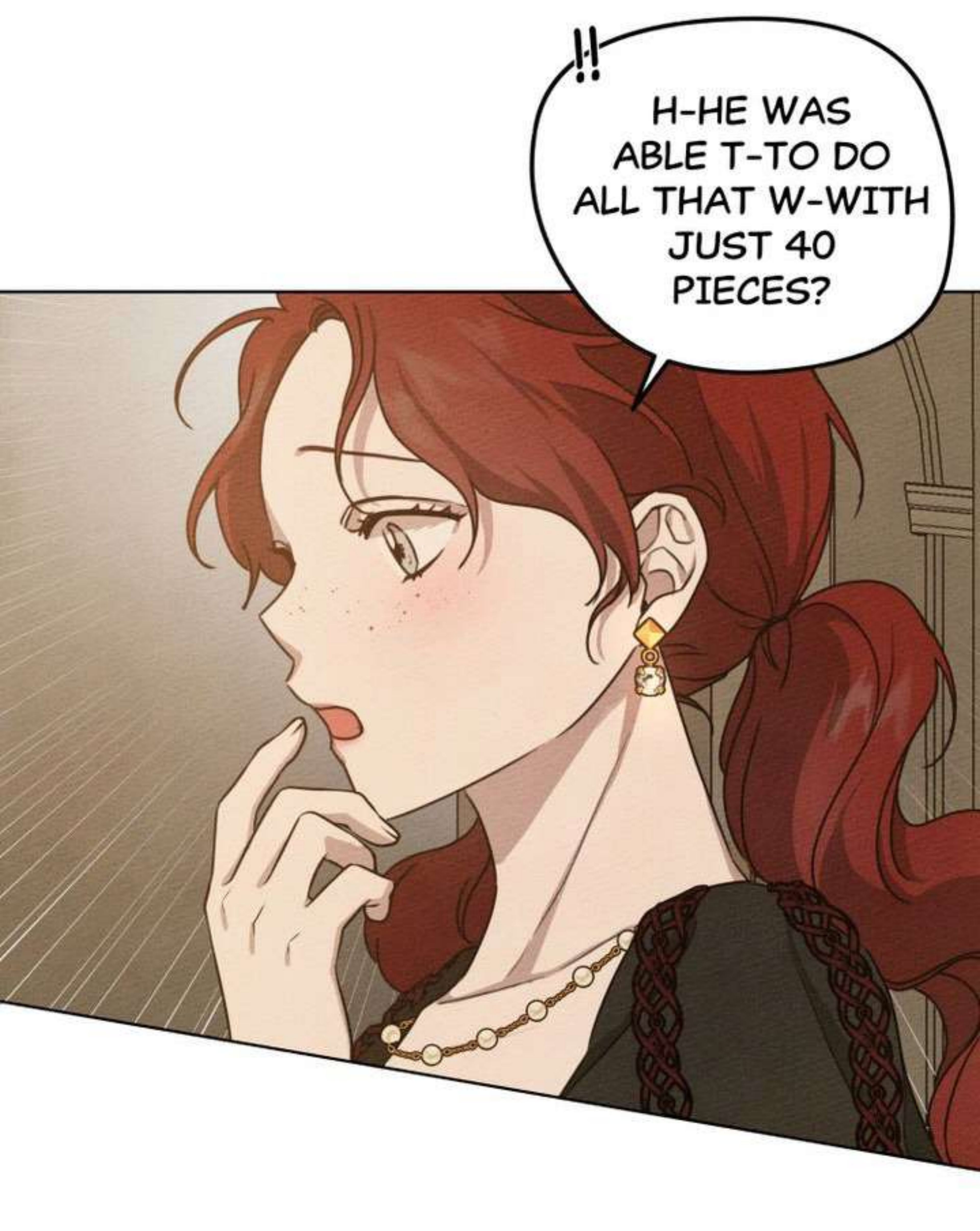

IT'S A BOOK-SIZED COIN MADE BY ORICHALCUM※.

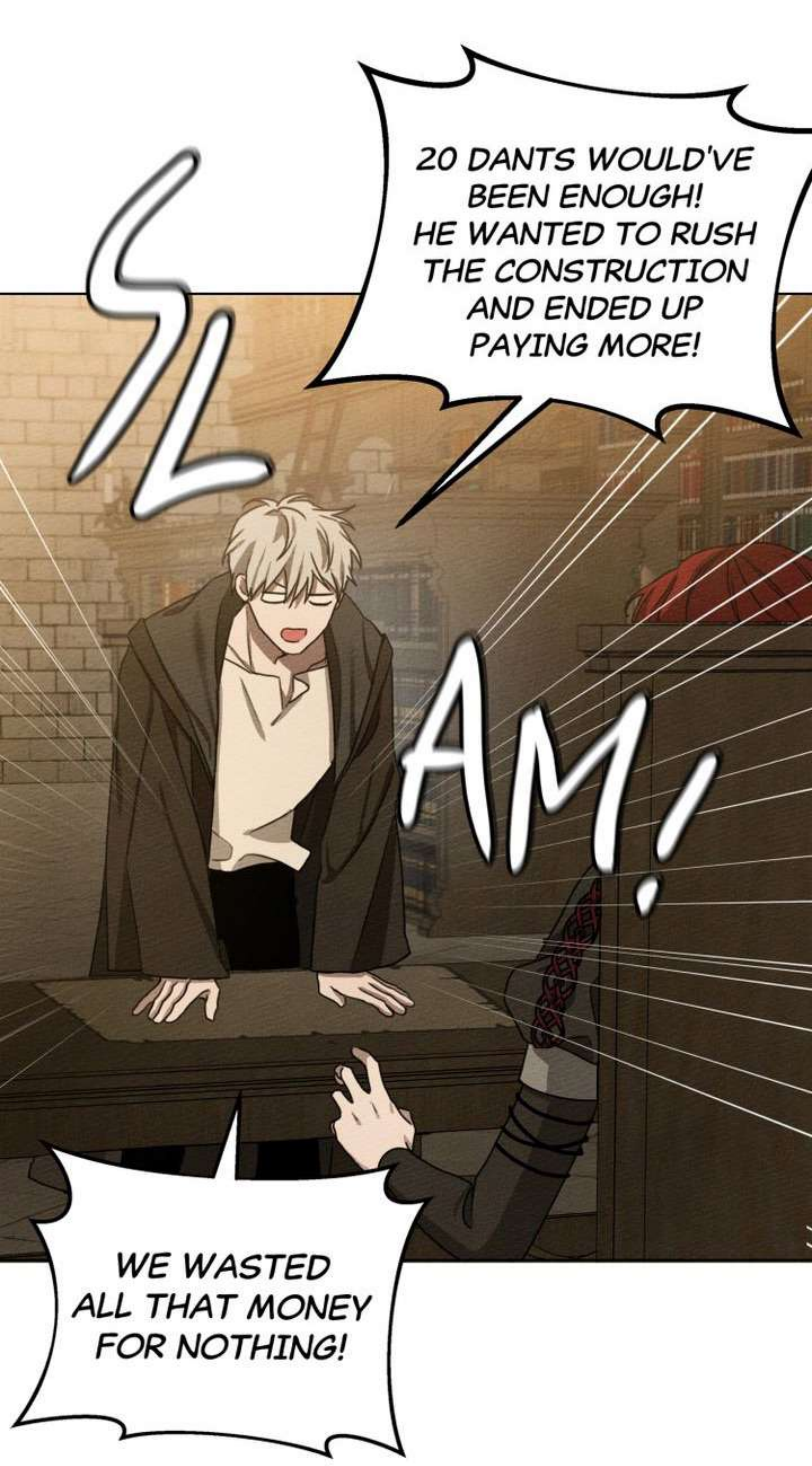
* ORICHALCUM: A METAL KNOWN AS THE ORE OF THE GODS.

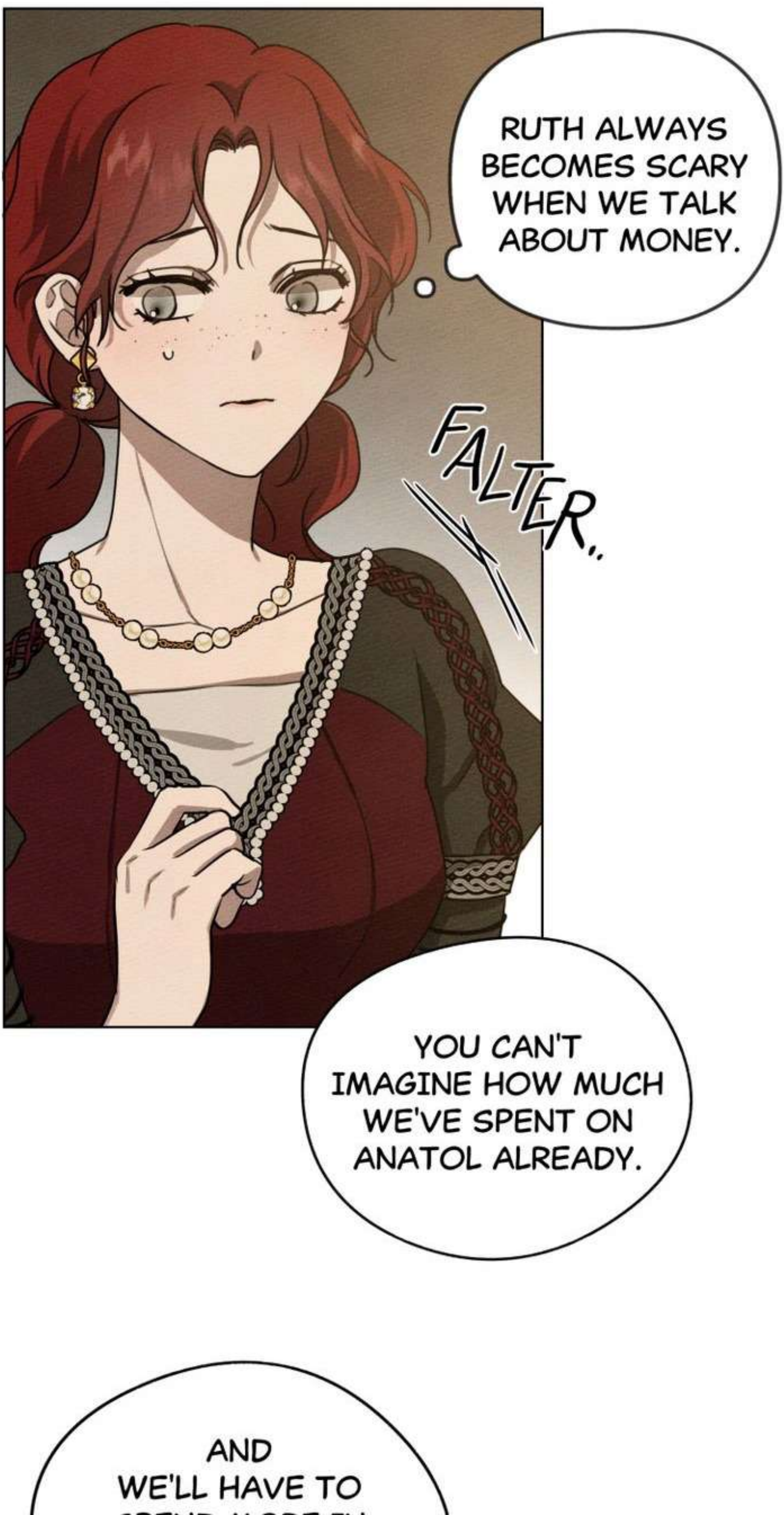

IT'S SAID THAT THERE ARE ONLY 600 DANTS, AND SIR RIFTAN OWNS 160.
!

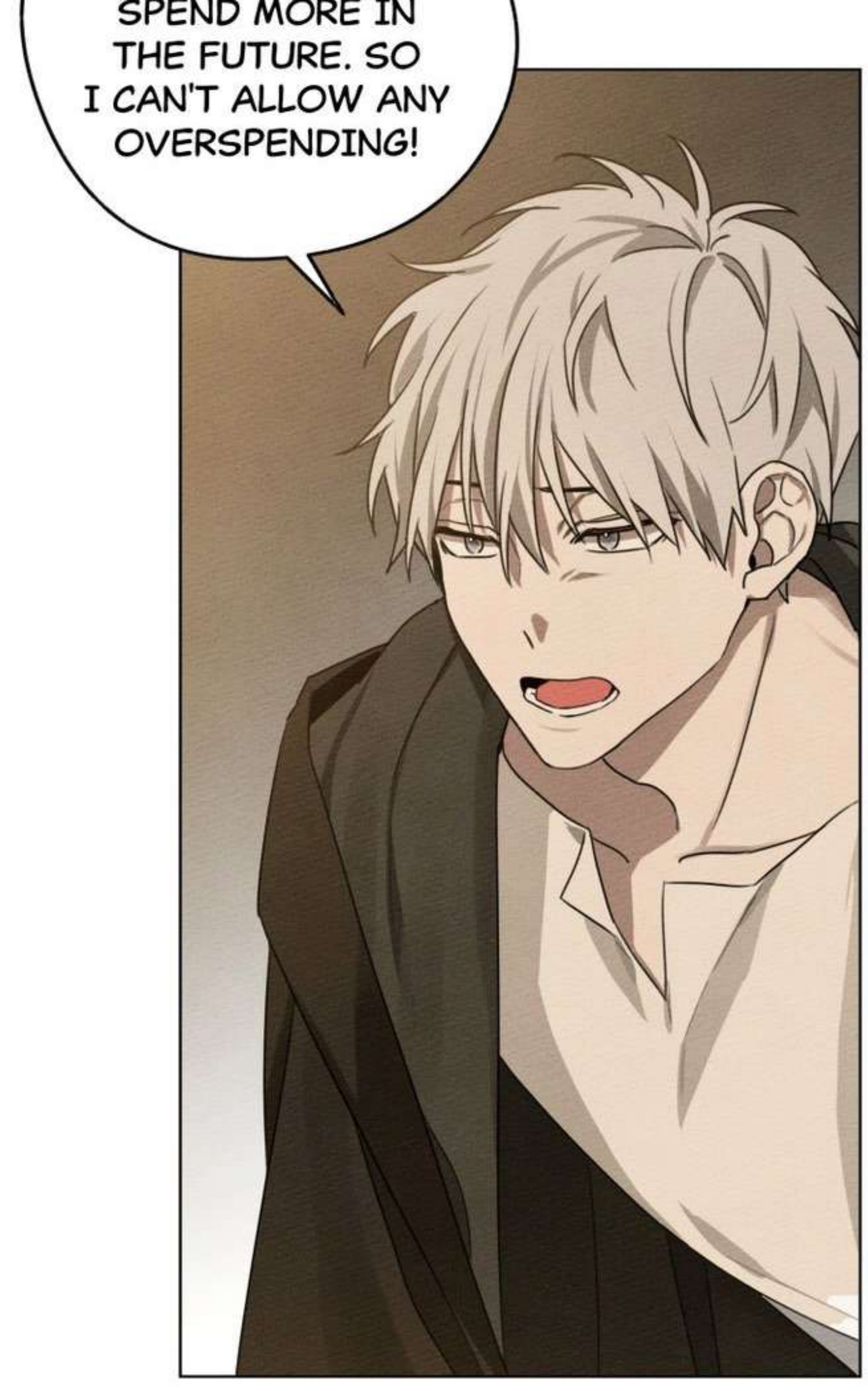

HE FOUND THEM SIX YEARS AGO IN A MONSTER LAIR IN OSIRIYA.
AT THE TIME, SIR RIFTAN HUNTED MONSTERS LIKE A MADMAN AND COLLECTED ALL KINDS OF TREASURES.

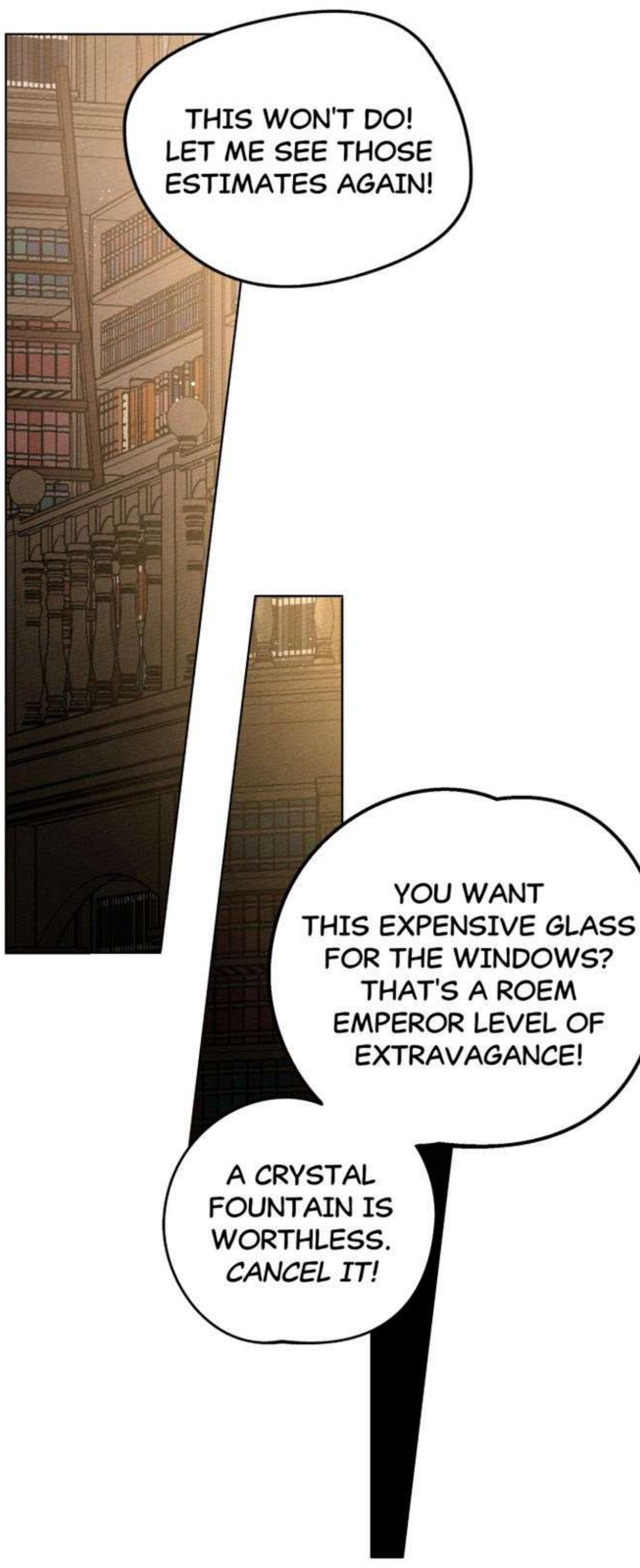

THE DANT COINS WERE AMONG THE MOST VALUABLE.
DANT
DANT
HE ORIGINALLY OWNED 200 DANTS, BUT HE SPENT 40 TO BUILD
CASTLE WALLS, VILLAGE ROADS, AND ON REPAIRS.

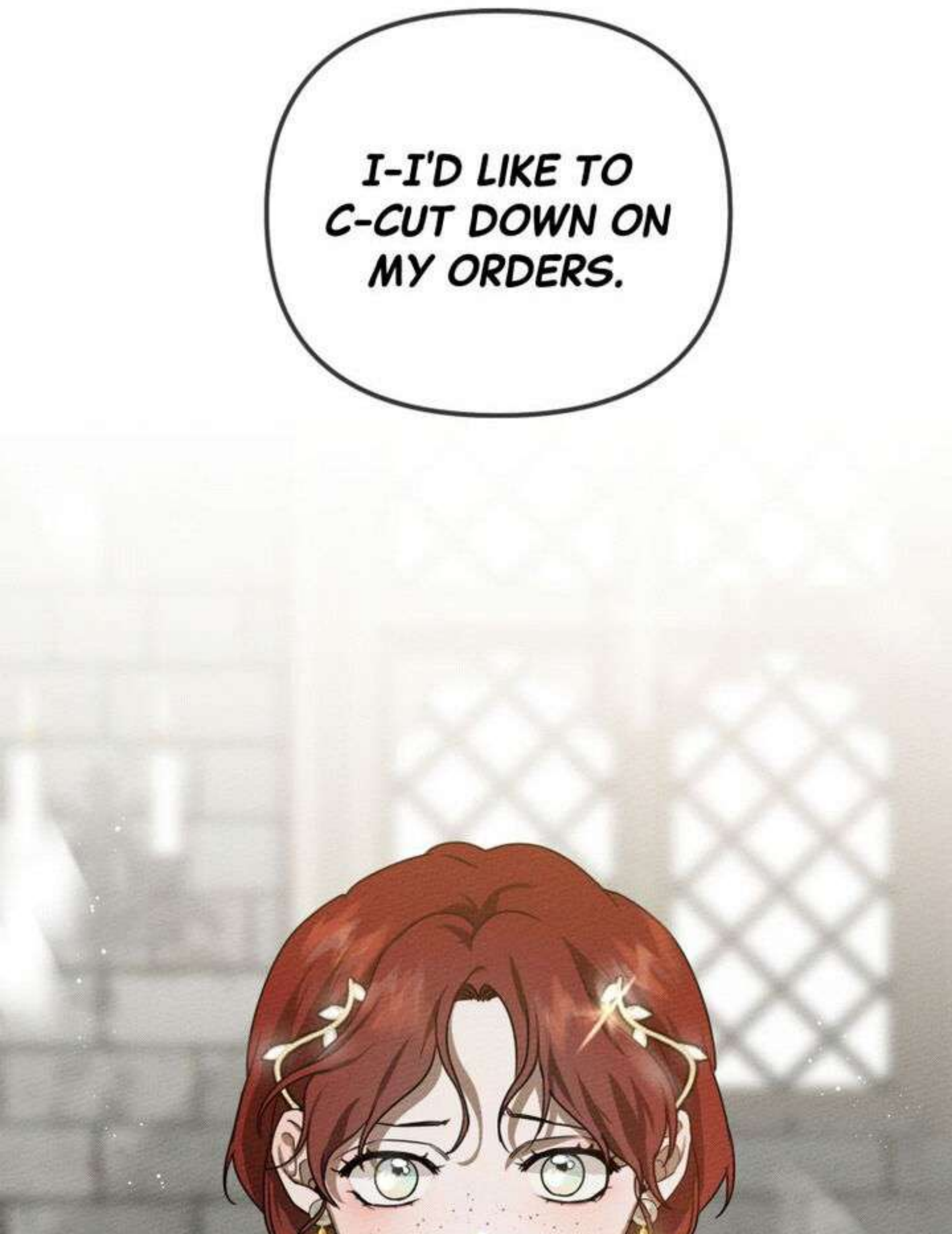

!!
H-HE WAS ABLE T-TO DO ALL THAT W-WITH JUST 40 PIECES?

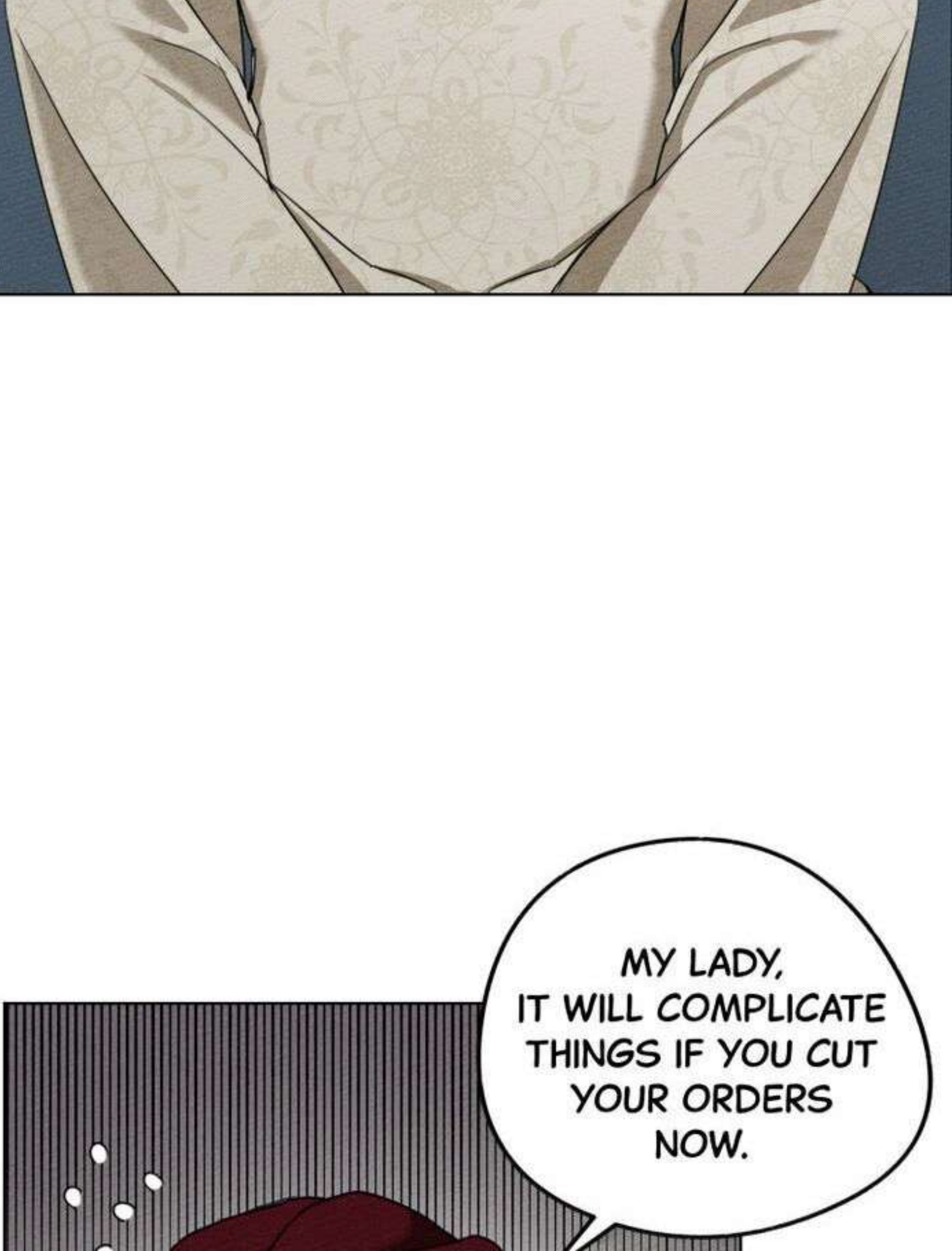

20 DANTS WOULD'VE BEEN ENOUGH! HE WANTED TO RUSH THE CONSTRUCTION AND ENDED UP PAYING MORE!
SLAM!
WE WASTED ALL THAT MONEY FOR NOTHING!

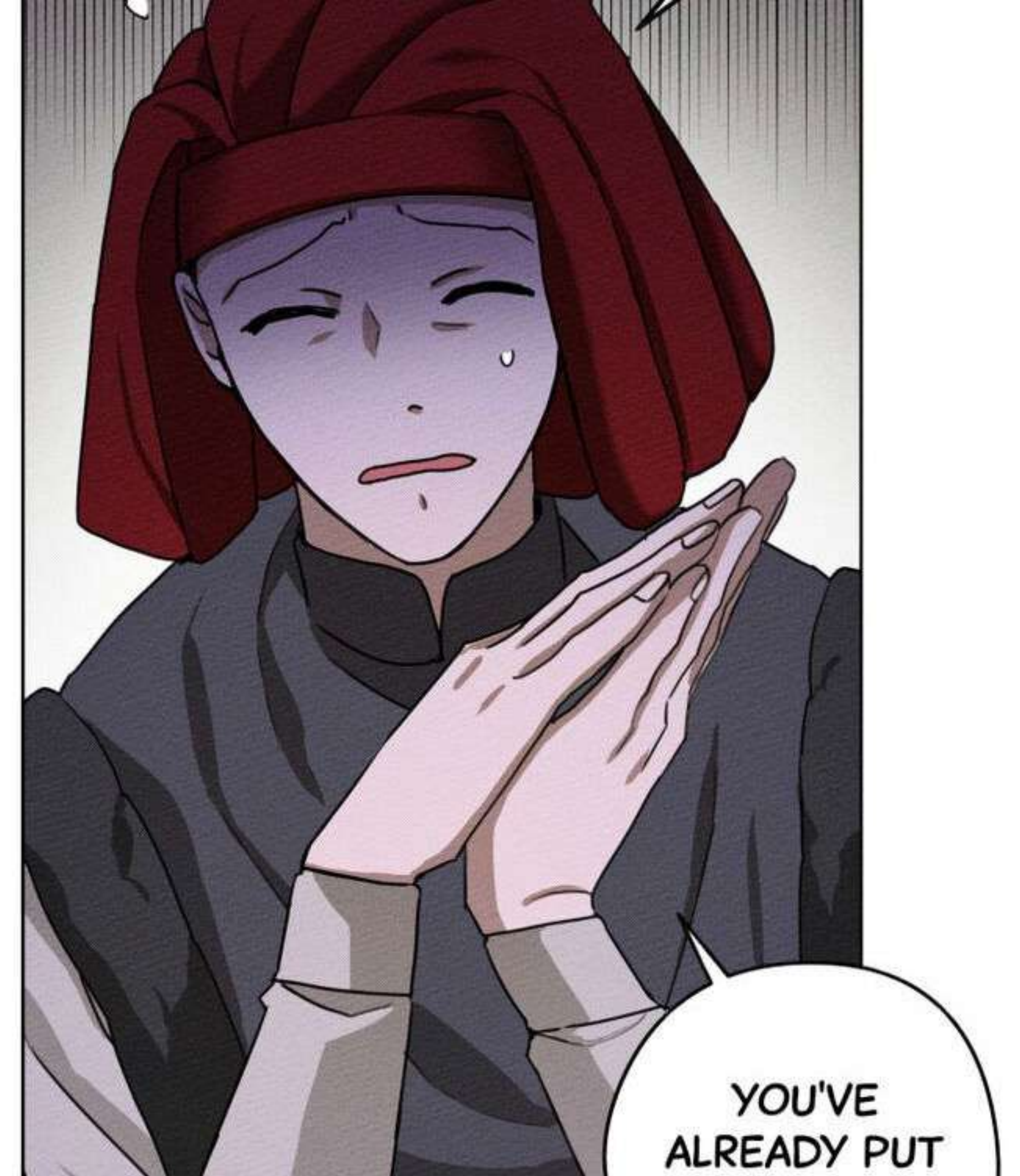

RUTH ALWAYS BECOMES SCARY WHEN WE TALK ABOUT MONEY.
FALTER..
YOU CAN'T IMAGINE HOW MUCH WE'VE SPENT ON ANATOL ALREADY.
AND WE'LL HAVE TO

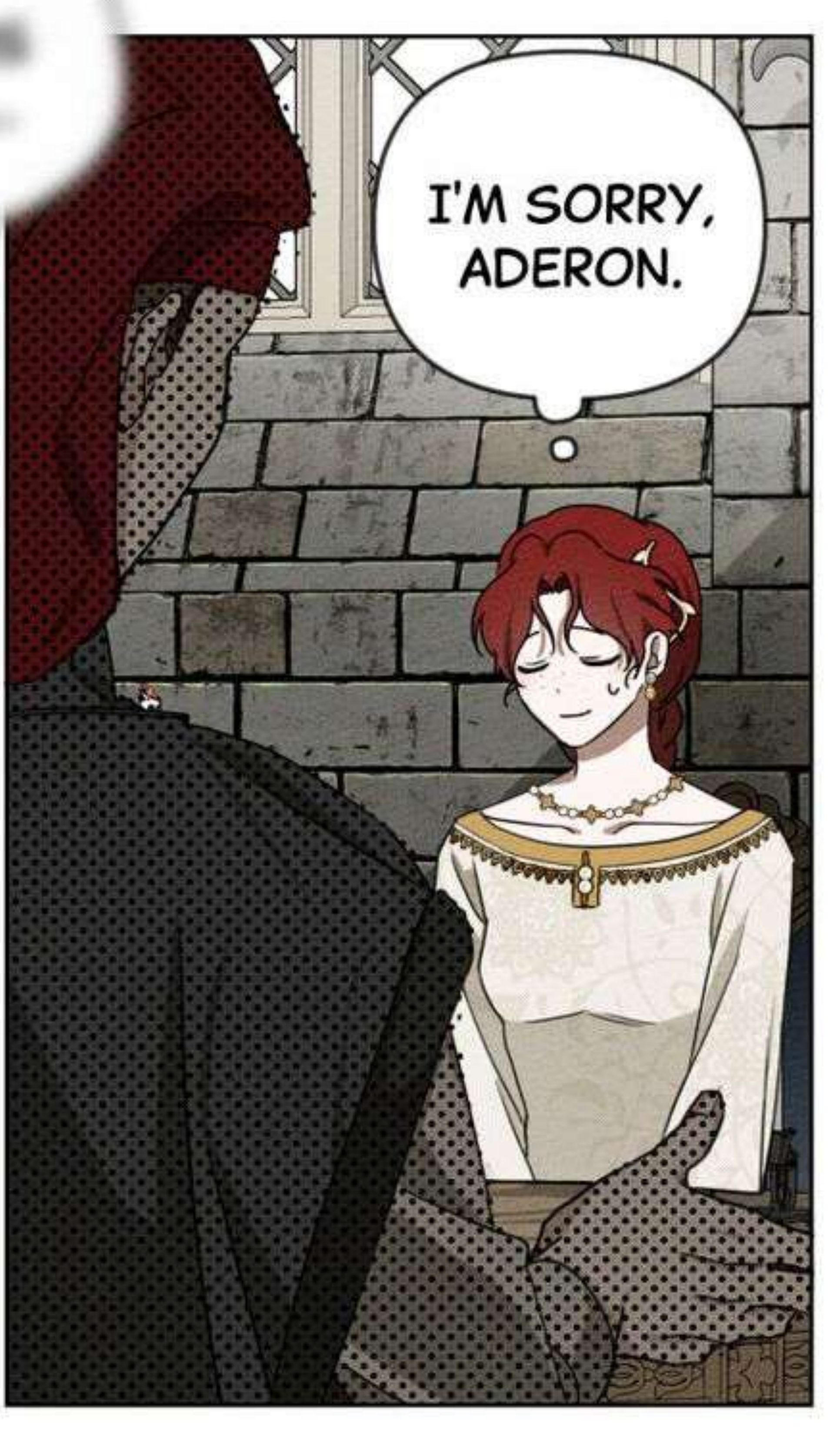

SPEND MORE IN THE FUTURE. SO I CAN'T ALLOW ANY OVERSPENDING!

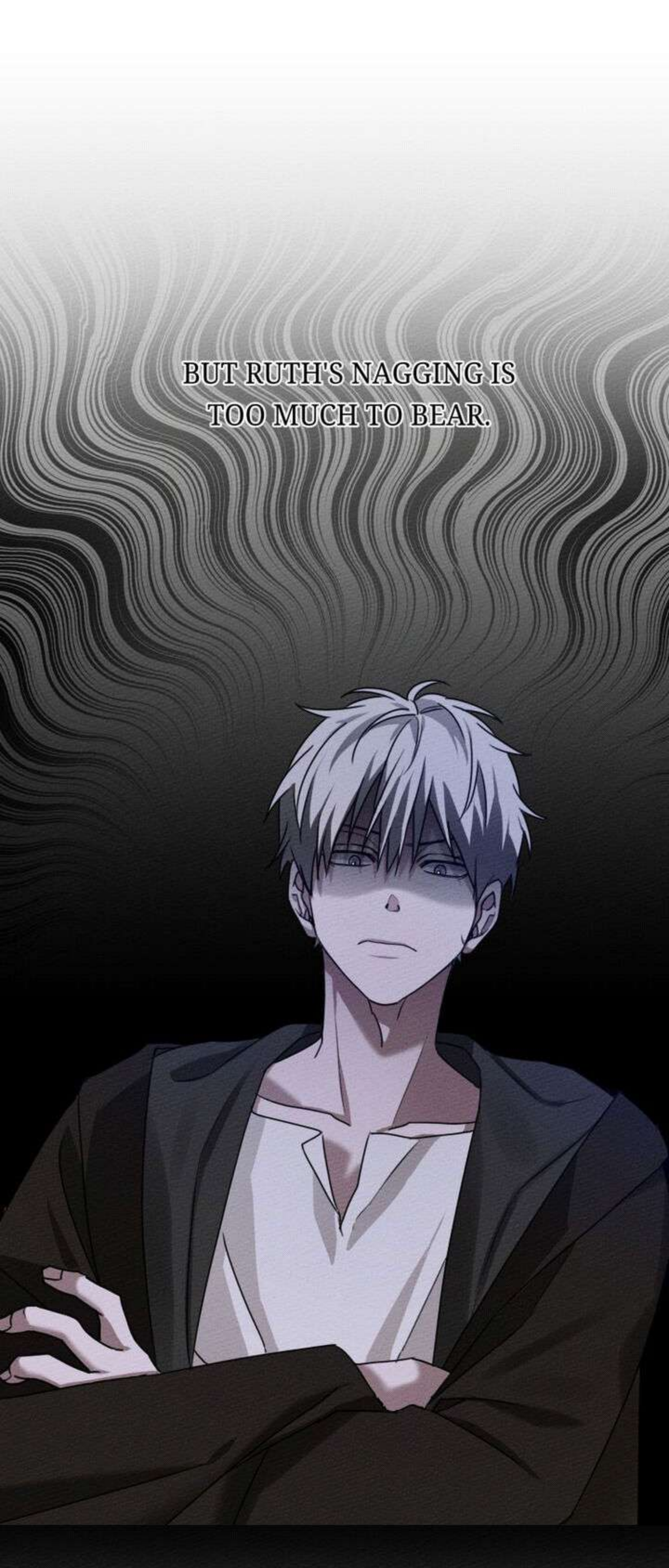

THIS WON'T DO! LET ME SEE THOSE ESTIMATES AGAIN!
YOU WANT THIS EXPENSIVE GLASS FOR THE WINDOWS? THAT'S A ROEM EMPEROR LEVEL OF EXTRAVAGANCE!
A CRYSTAL FOUNTAIN IS WORTHLESS. CANCEL IT!
AND WHAT'S THIS?
DO YOU KNOW HOW EXPENSIVE IT IS TO TILE THE GREAT HALL IN MARBLE?
YOU'RE SO OUT OF TOUCH WITH THE WORLD...


I-I'D LIKE TO C-CUT DOWN ON MY ORDERS.


MY LADY, IT WILL COMPLICATE THINGS IF YOU CUT YOUR ORDERS NOW.


YOU'VE ALREADY PUT THEM IN...
I-I'M SORRY. THE C-CONSTRUCTION HASN'T S-STARTED YET...
PLEASE, RECONSIDER.


SO, UH...
THIS IS...
I'M SORRY, ADERON.

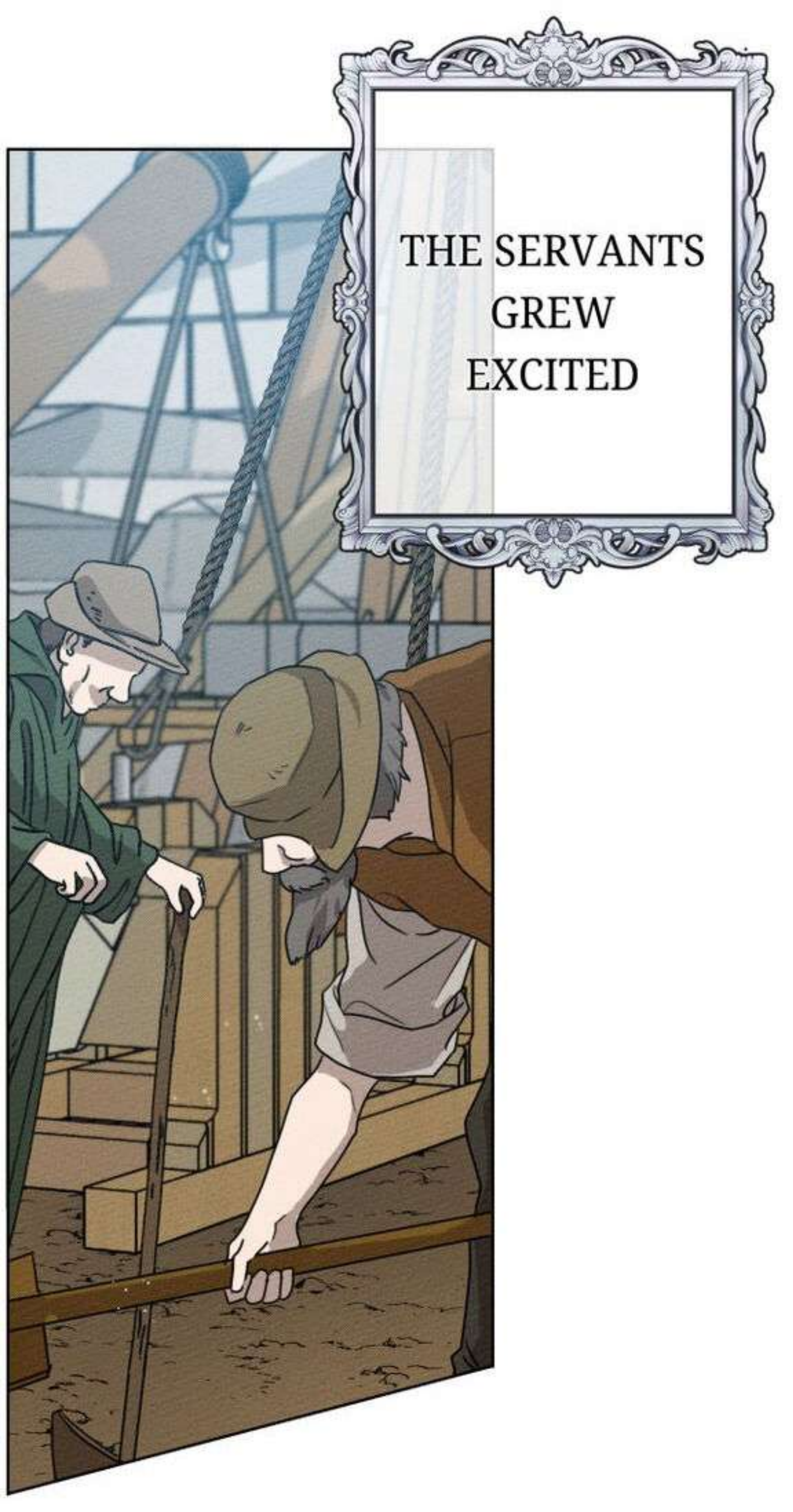

BUT RUTH'S NAGGING IS TOO MUCH TO BEAR.

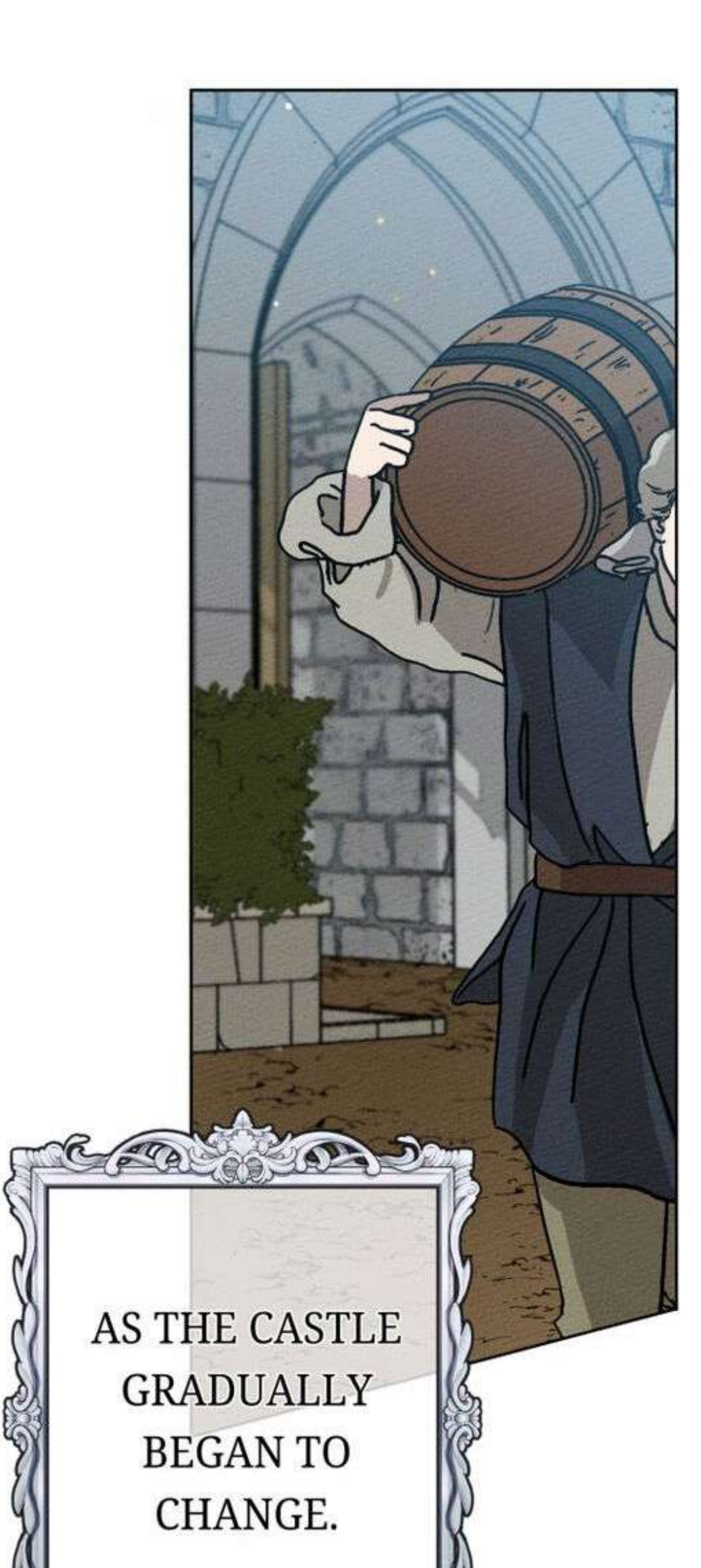
Under the Oak Tree

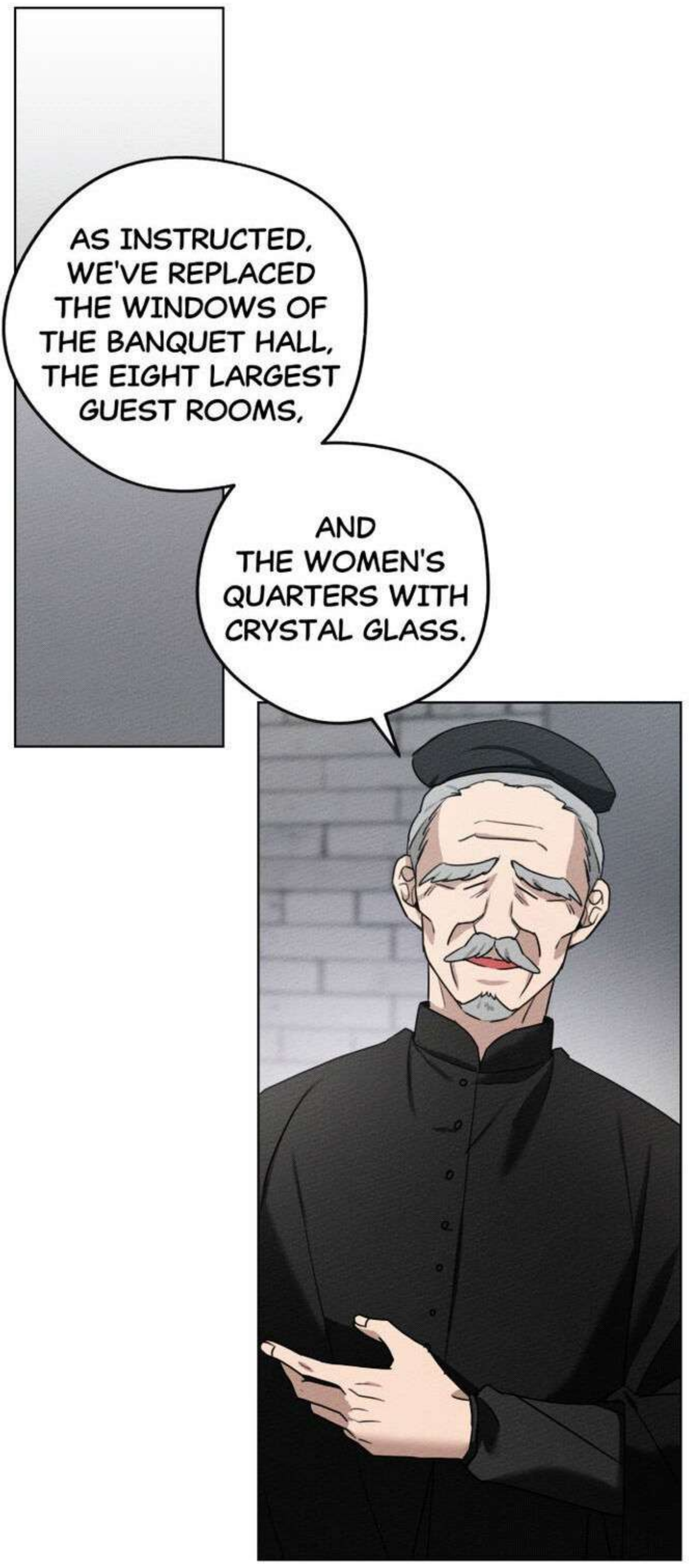
ILLUSTRATION **P** ◆ ADAPTED BY **namu** ◆ WRITER **Kim Suji**

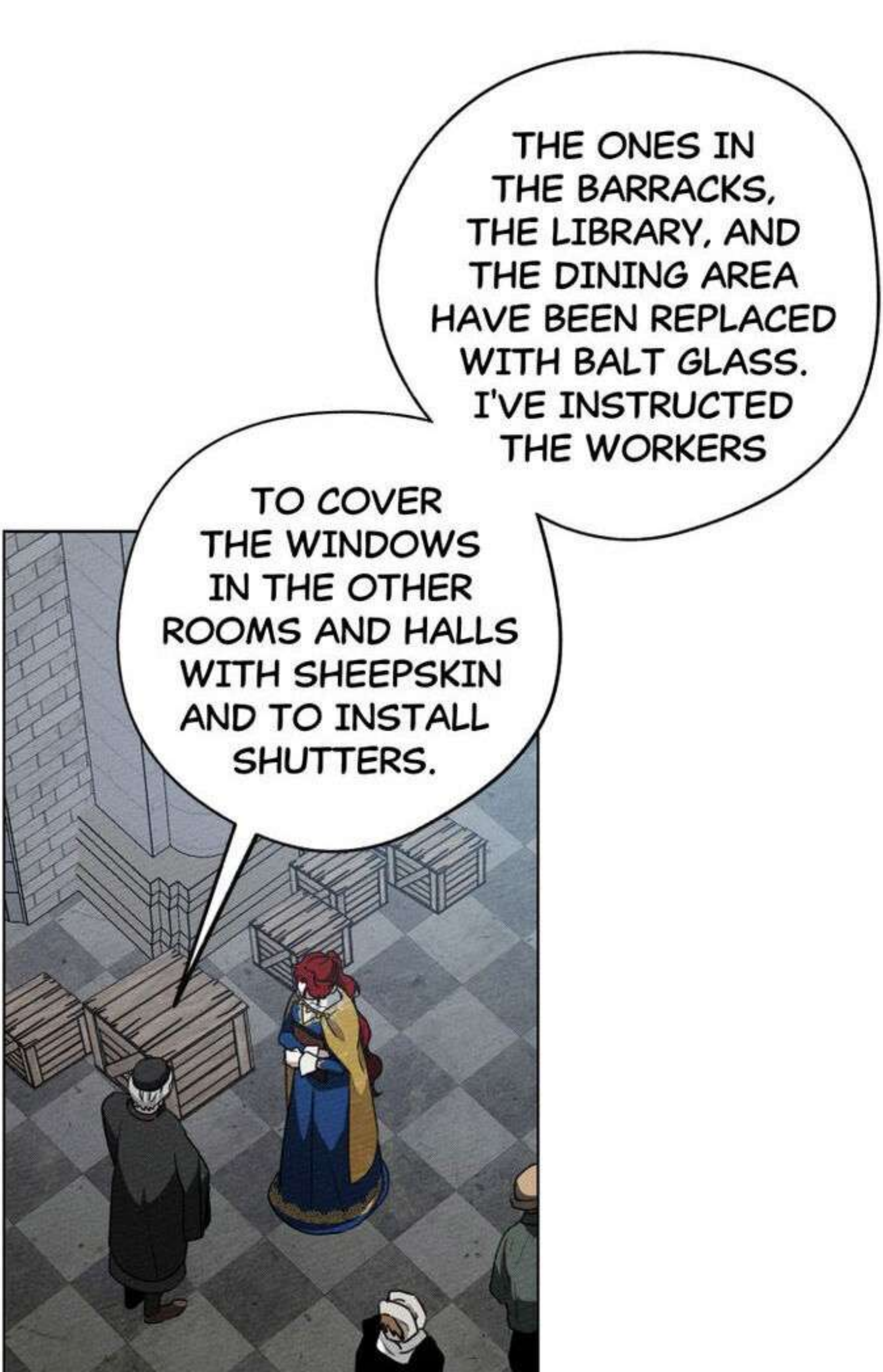
20

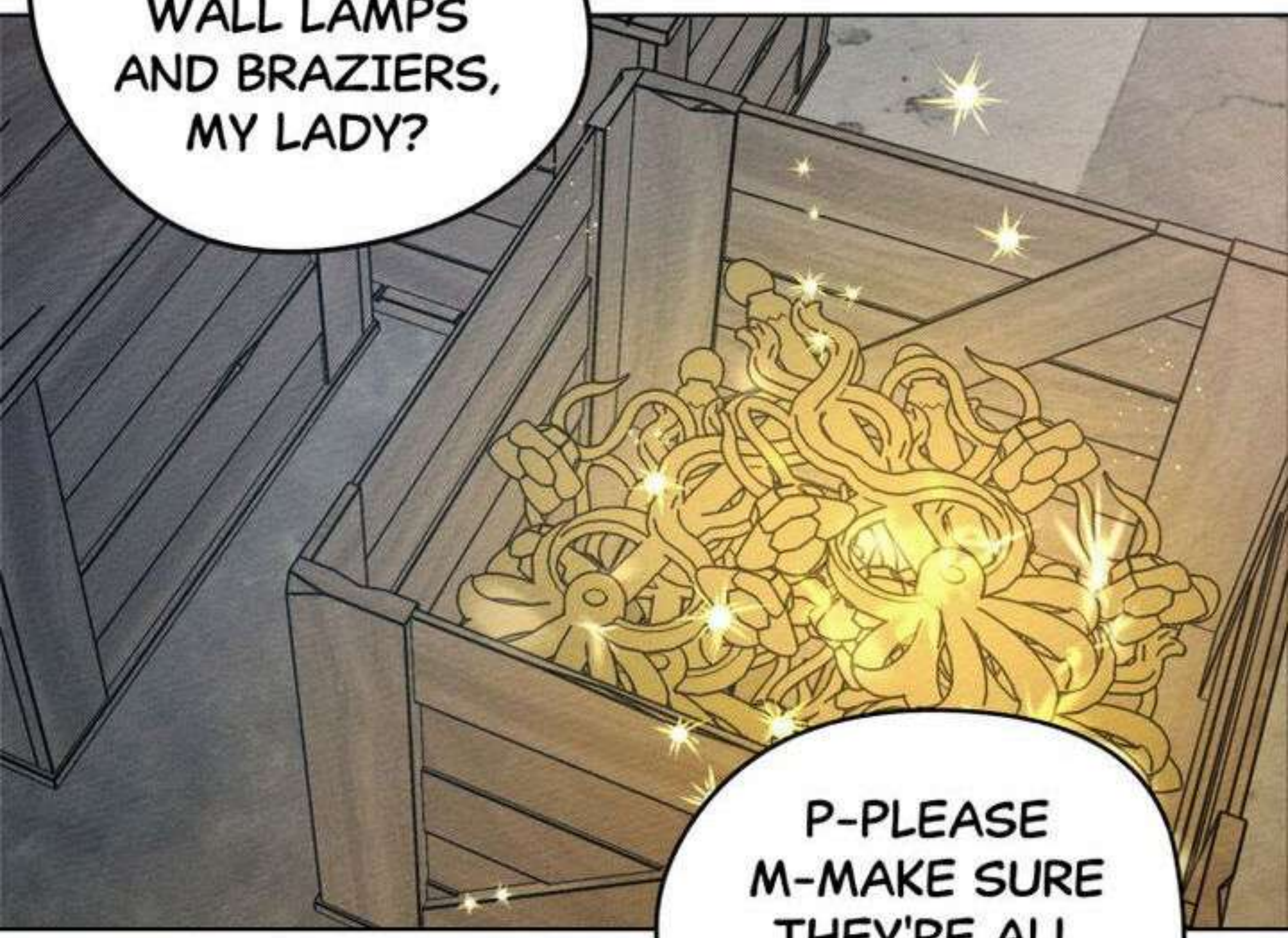
THE CASTLE IS CHANGING.
CAREFUL! THOSE MARBLE TILES ARE EXPENSIVE!
THE CASTLE RENOVATIONS BEGAN ONCE THE SUPPLIES ARRIVED.
OI! WE NEED SOME HERE TOO!
COMING!

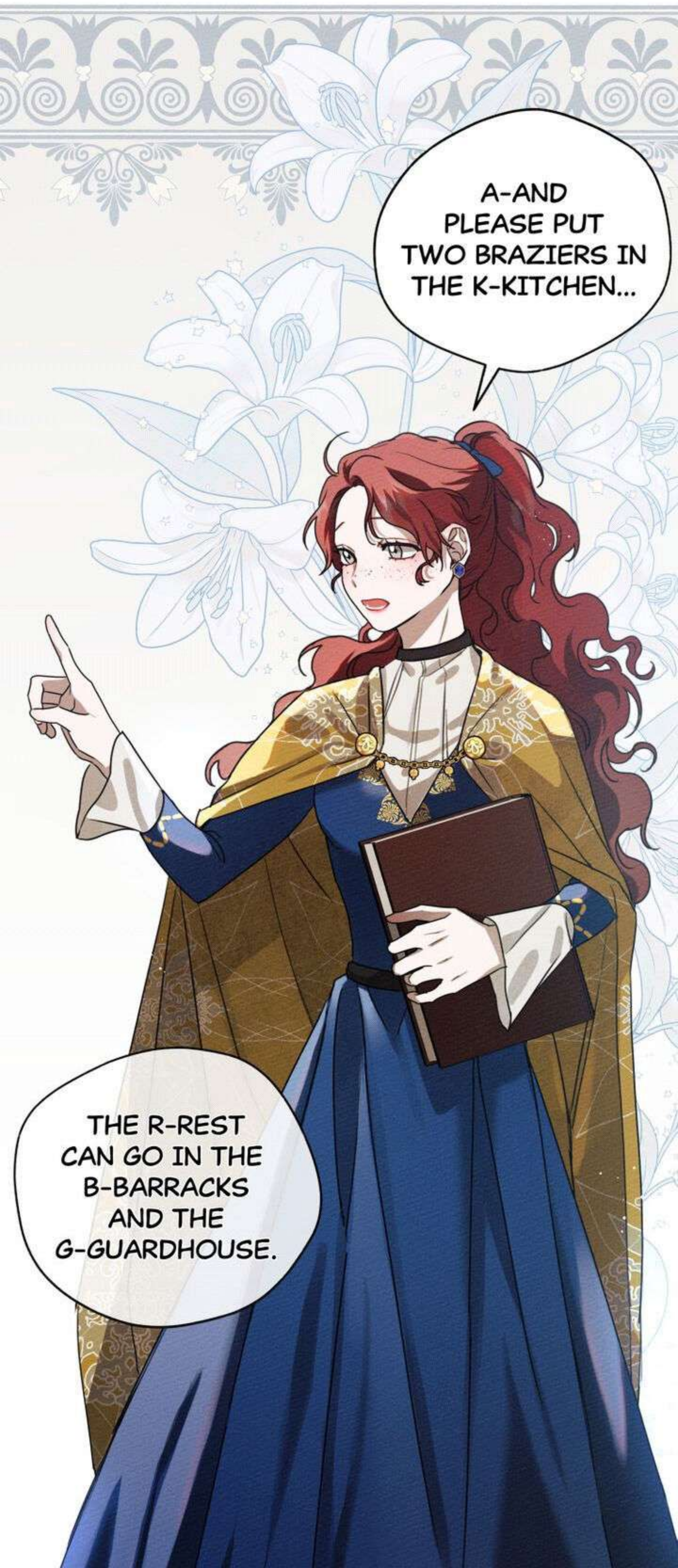

THE SERVANTS GREW EXCITED


AS THE CASTLE GRADUALLY BEGAN TO CHANGE.

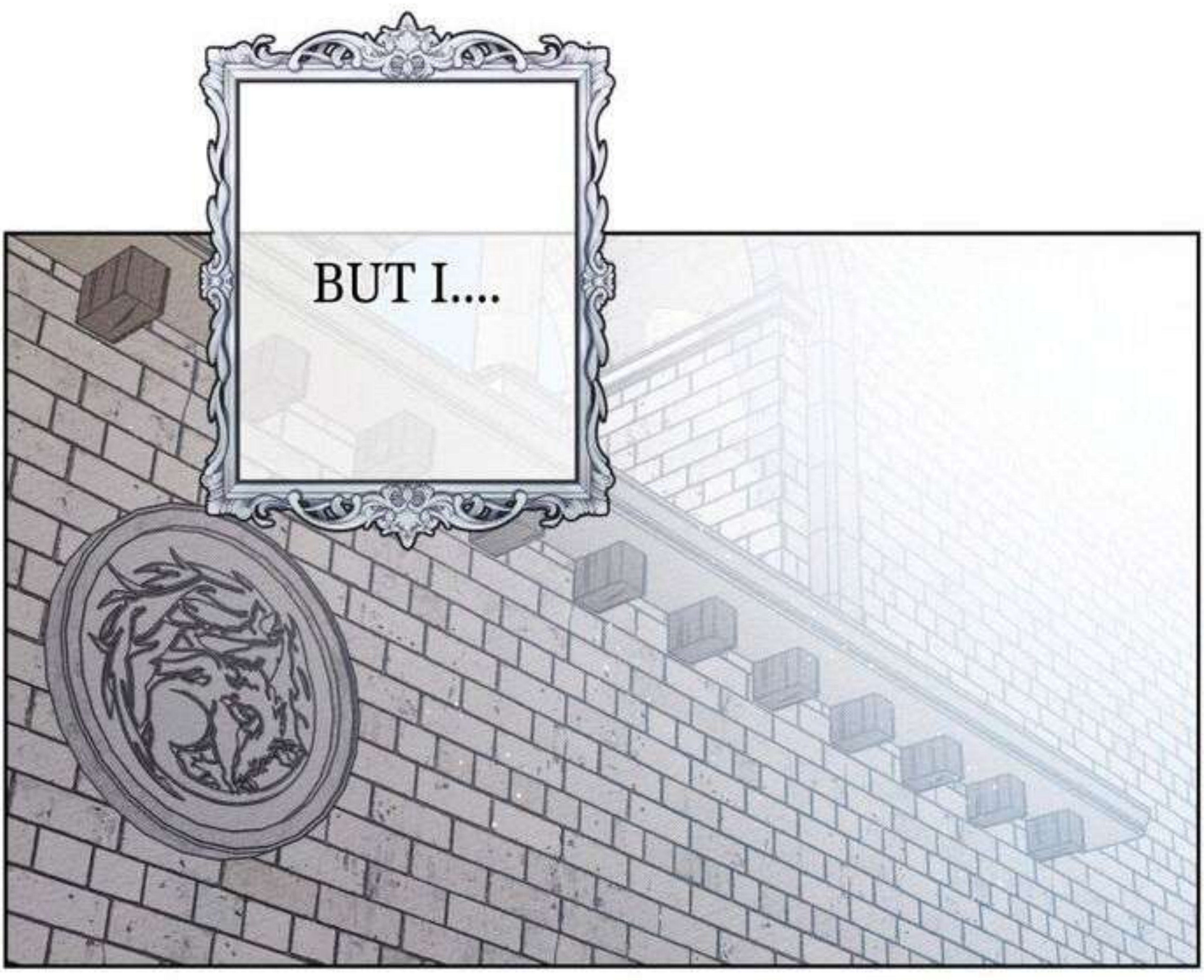

AS INSTRUCTED, WE'VE REPLACED THE WINDOWS OF THE BANQUET HALL, THE EIGHT LARGEST GUEST ROOMS,
AND THE WOMEN'S QUARTERS WITH CRYSTAL GLASS.


THE ONES IN THE BARRACKS, THE LIBRARY, AND THE DINING AREA HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITH BALT GLASS. I'VE INSTRUCTED THE WORKERS
TO COVER THE WINDOWS IN THE OTHER ROOMS AND HALLS WITH SHEEPSKIN AND TO INSTALL SHUTTERS.


WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH THE WALL LAMPS AND BRAZIERS, MY LADY?
P-PLEASE M-MAKE SURE THEY'RE ALL IN G-GOOD CONDITION,
I-I WANT THEM PLACED IN THE H-HALLS, THE BANQUET HALL, AND THE C-CORRIDORS.

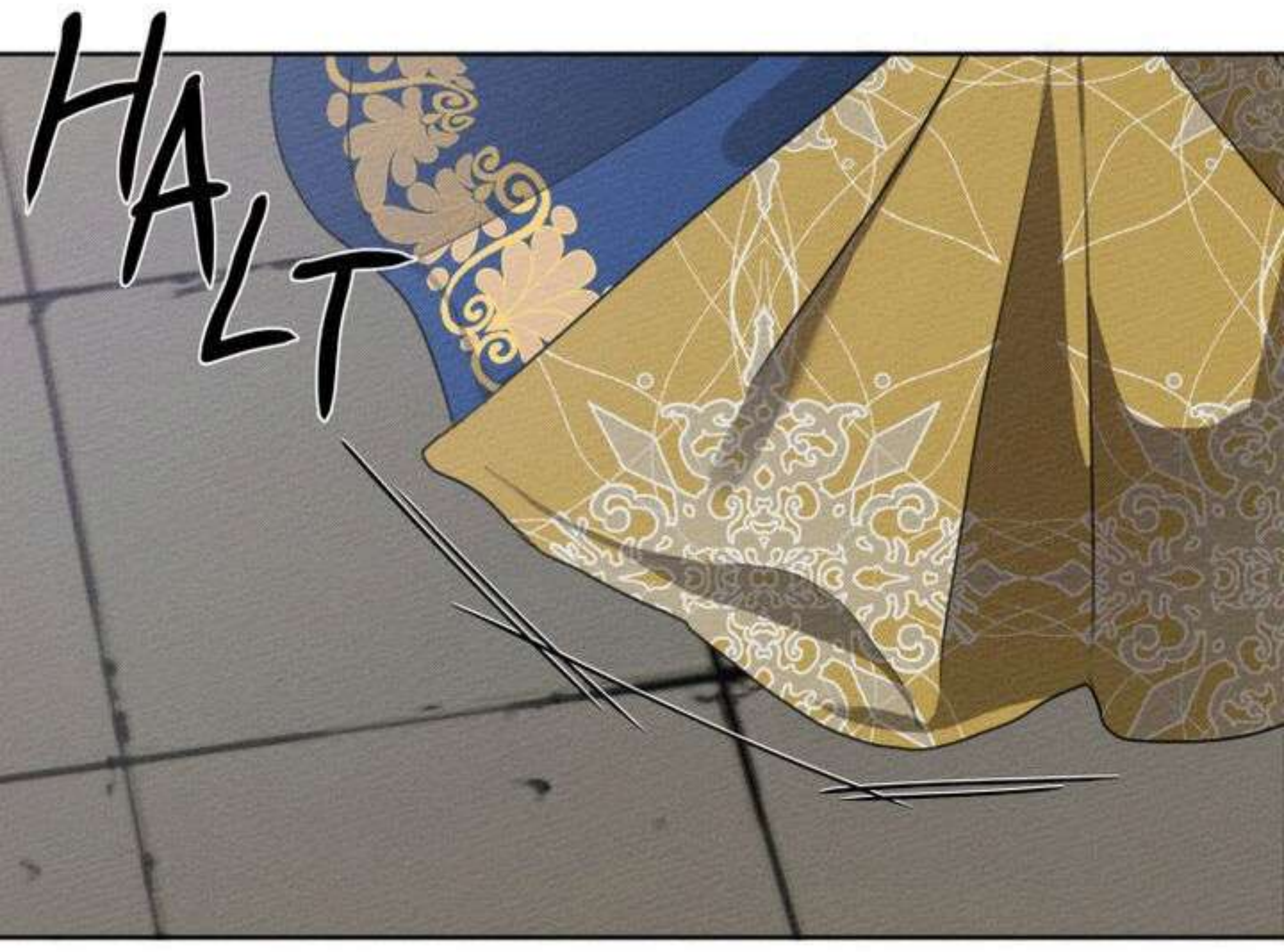

A-AND PLEASE PUT TWO BRAZIERS IN THE K-KITCHEN...
THE R-REST CAN GO IN THE B-BARRACKS AND THE G-GUARDHOUSE.

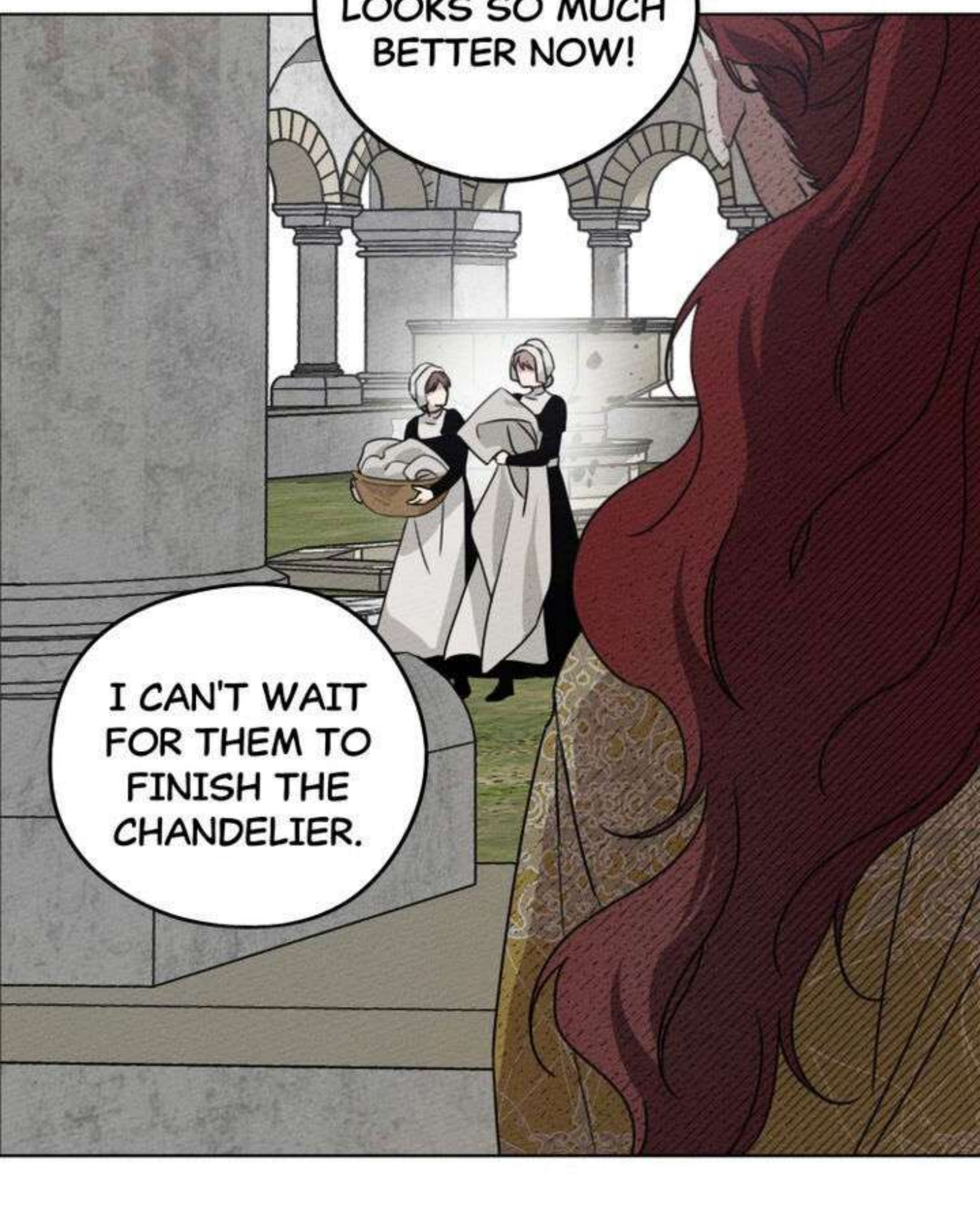
AS YOU WISH, MY LADY.

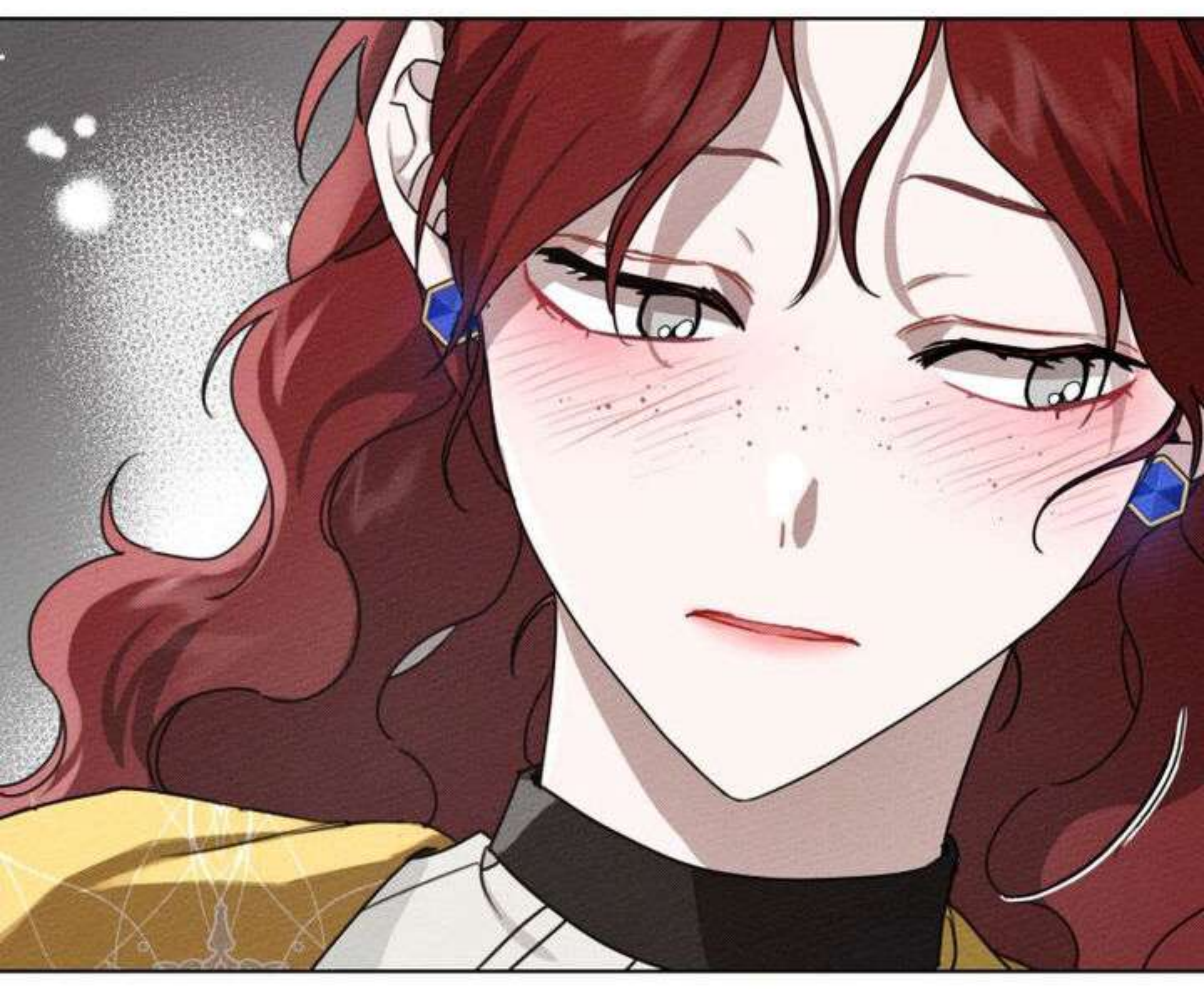


AM STILL UNCERTAIN.

I'VE BEEN SO BUSY WITH THE CONSTRUCTION I FORGOT ABOUT MAKING WINTER PREPARATIONS.
I SHOULD'VE TAKEN CARE OF IT IN RIFTAN'S ABSENCE...
AT LEAST THE LEDGERS ARE VERY THOROUGH.
ACCORDING TO THE LEDGER, I HAVE TO INSPECT THE CASTLE INTERIOR TO CHECK ON INVENTORY...

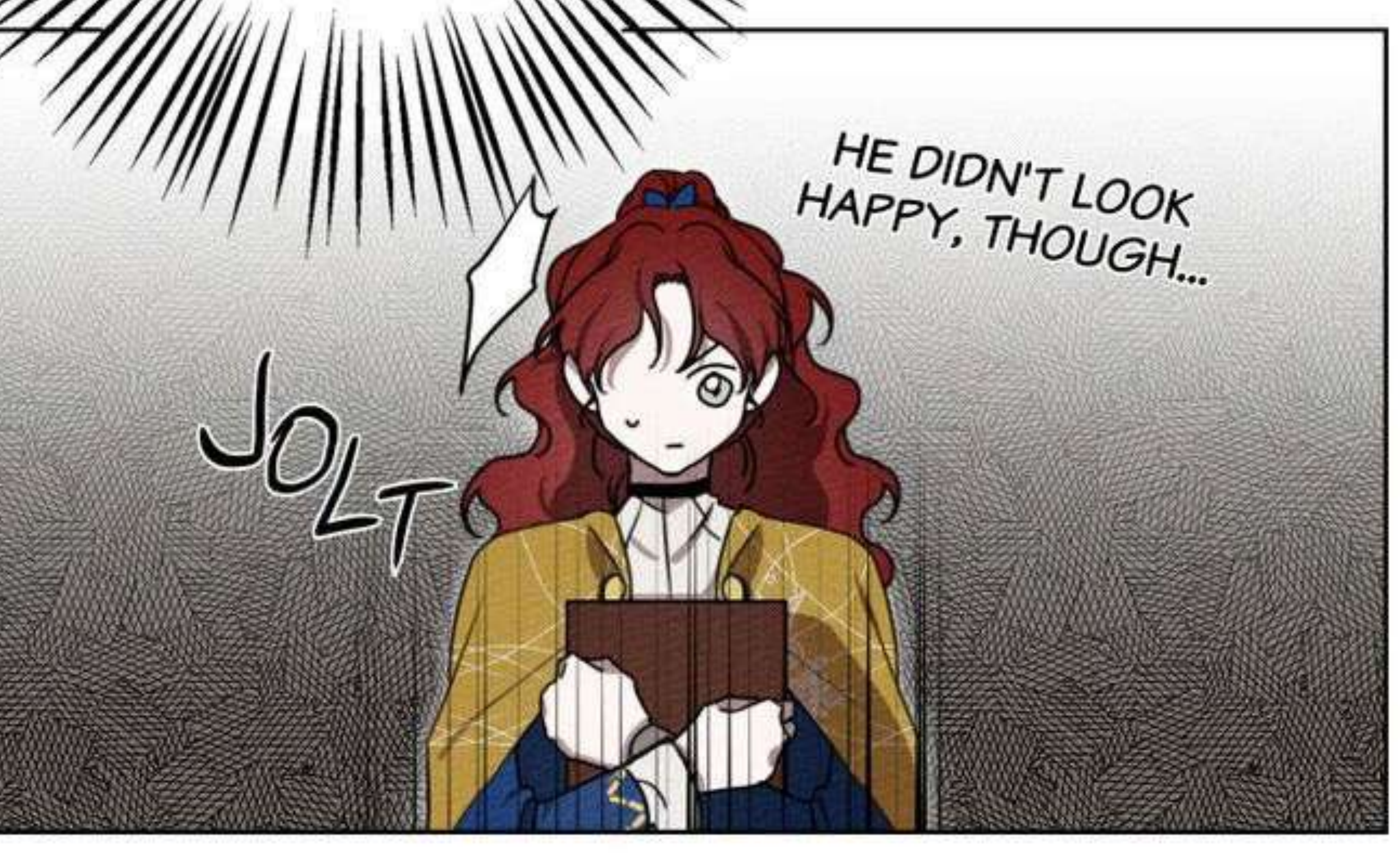

I'LL CHECK THE STABLES AND THE FORGE TODAY, AND—
I BET THE LORD WILL BE SURPRISED WHEN HE RETURNS.
HALT

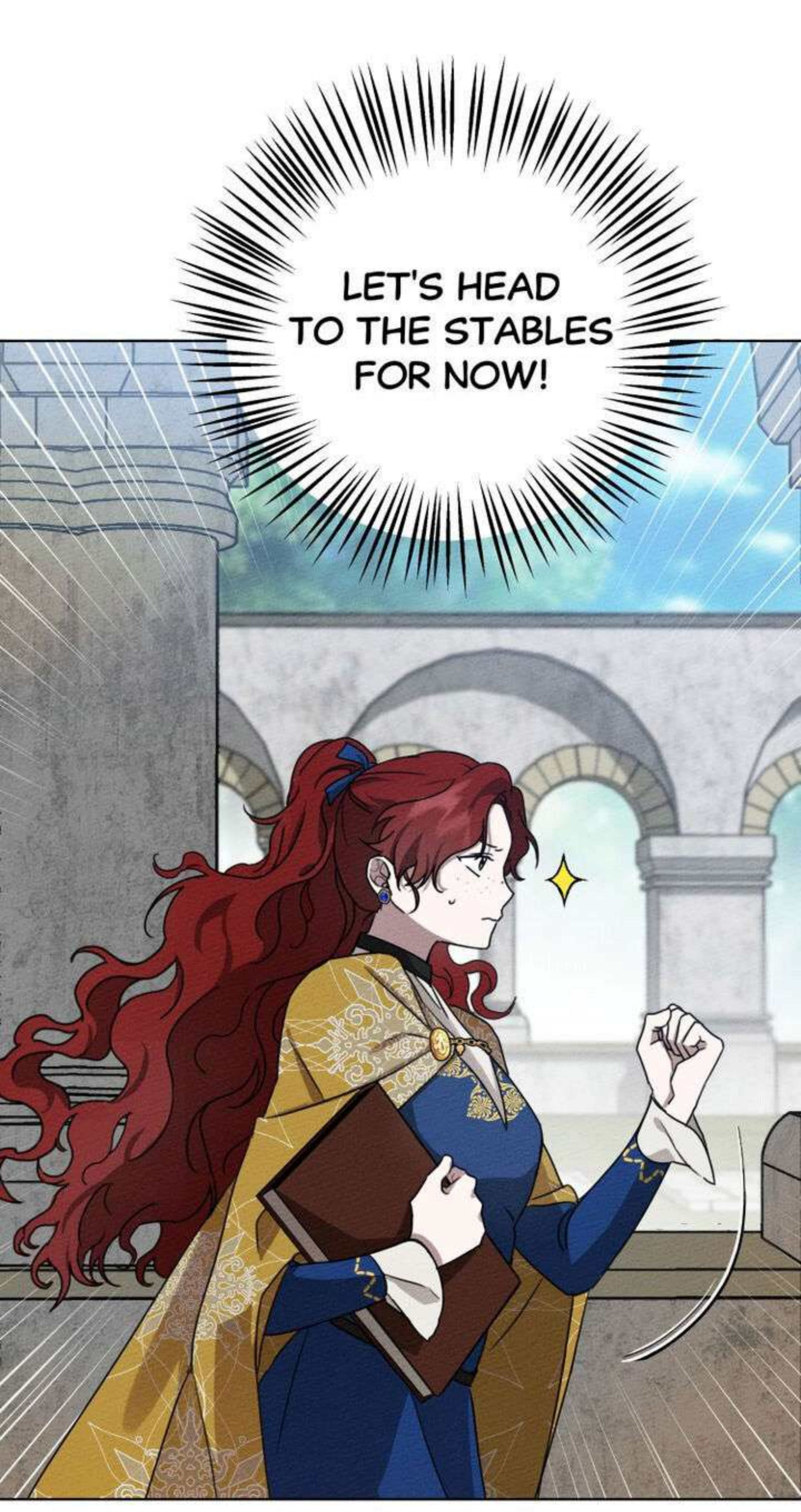

THE CASTLE LOOKS SO MUCH BETTER NOW!
I CAN'T WAIT FOR THEM TO FINISH THE CHANDELIER.
I'M SURE LORD RIFTAN WILL BE HAPPY TOO.

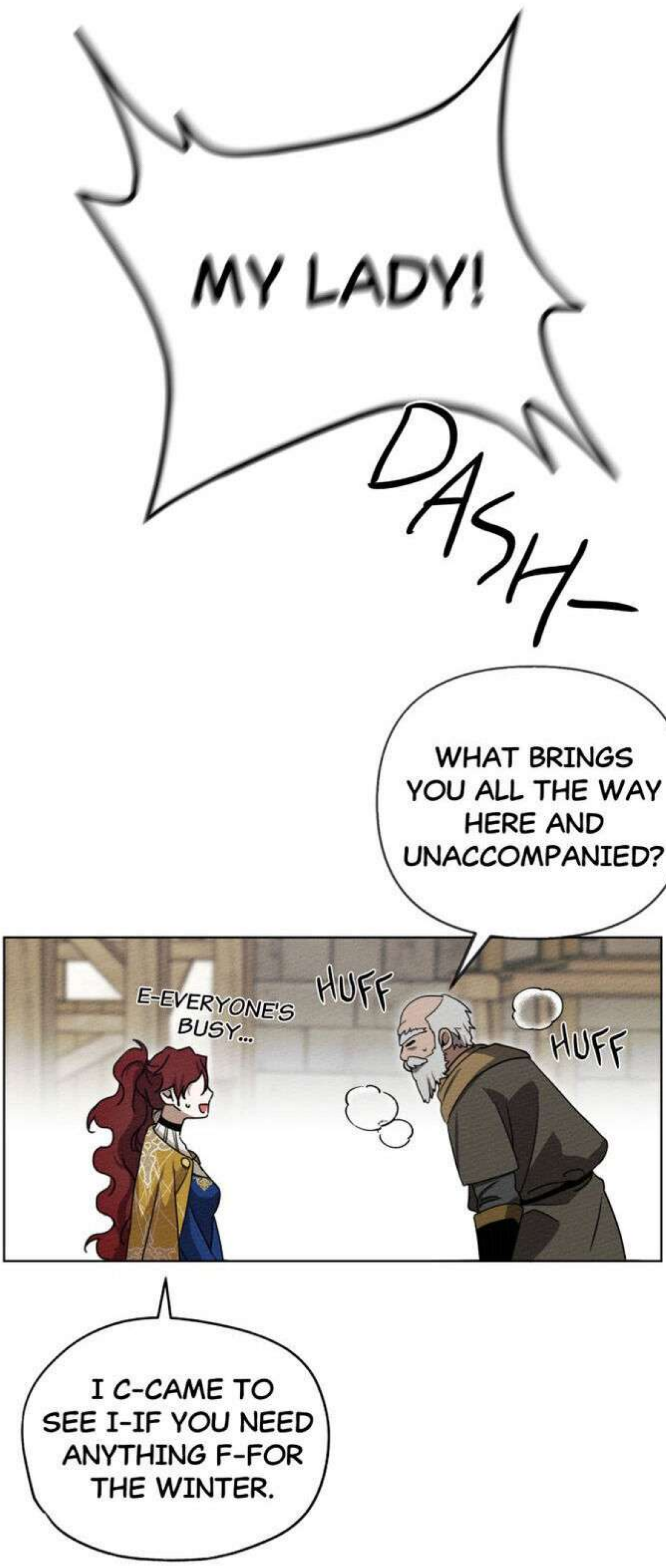


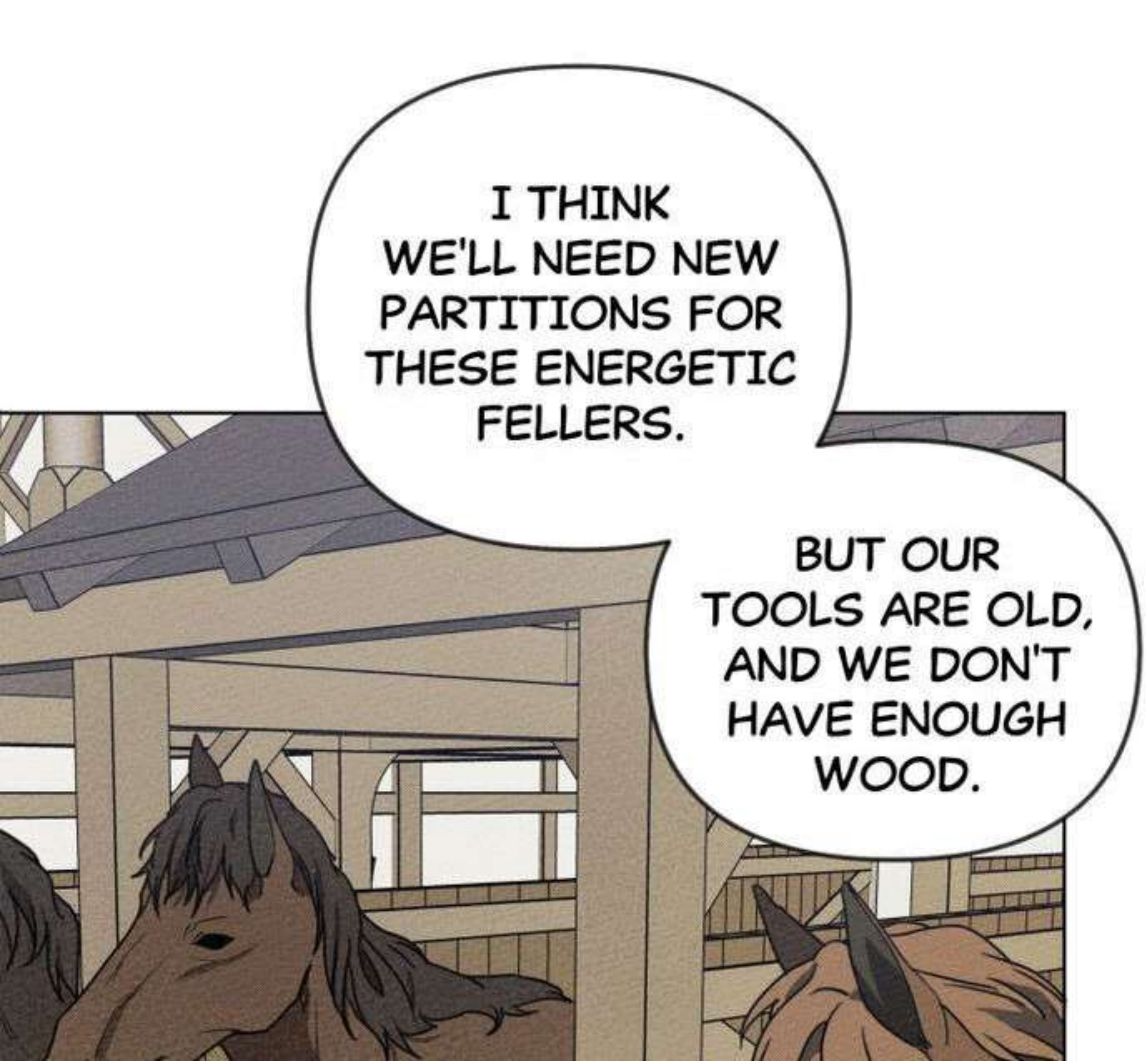
WILL HE REALLY LIKE IT?

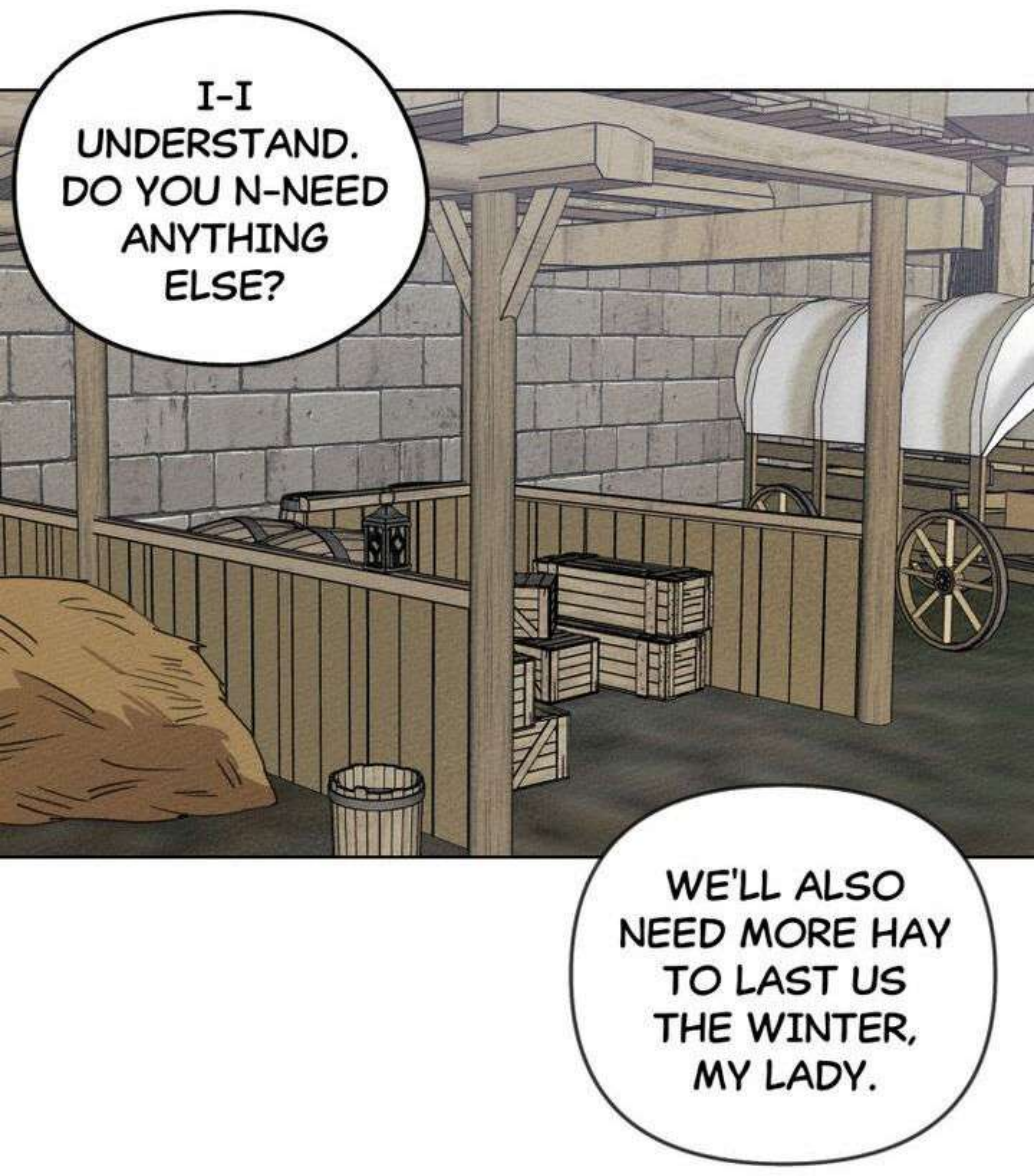
WHAT IF... HE THINKS I WENT OVERBOARD?
NAUSEOUS

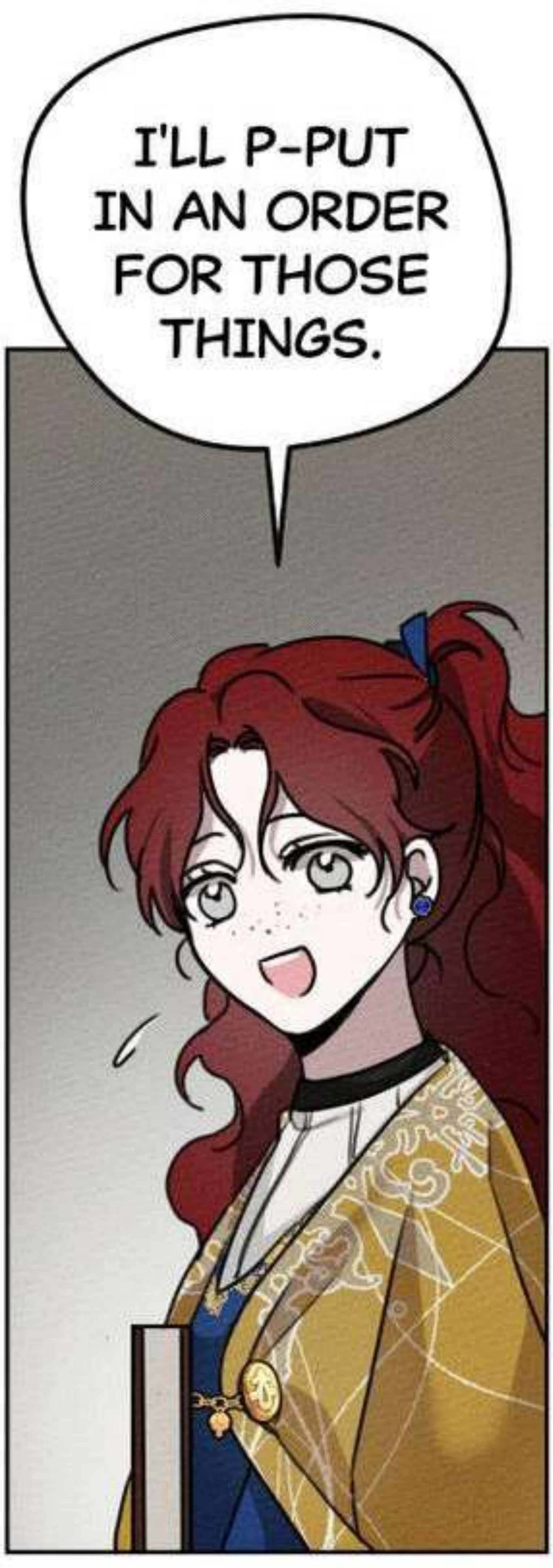

NO, EVEN RUTH SAID THIS MUCH WAS FINE!
HE DIDN'T LOOK HAPPY, THOUGH...
JOLT

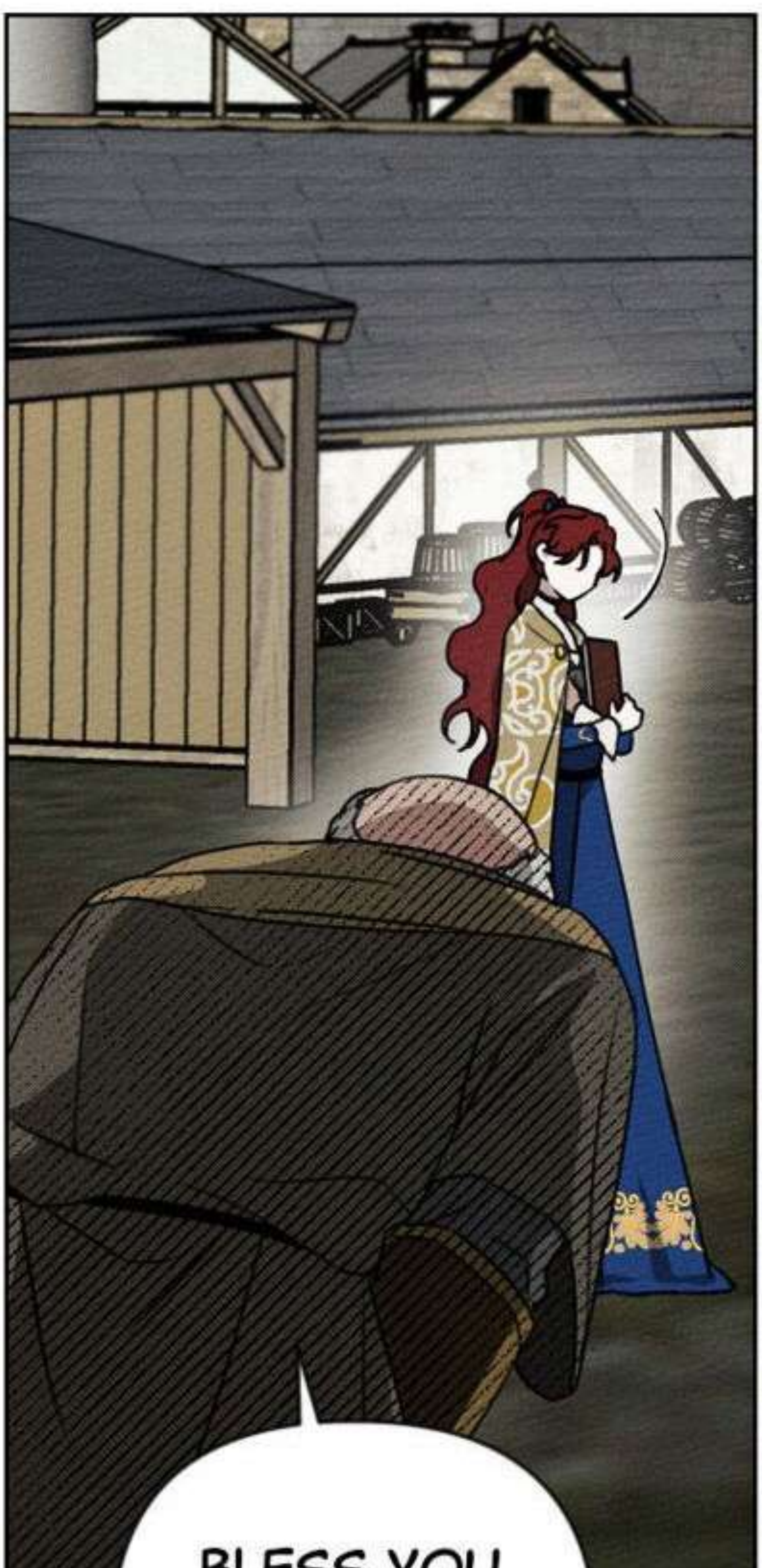

LET'S HEAD TO THE STABLES FOR NOW!


MY LADY!
DASH—
WHAT BRINGS YOU ALL THE WAY HERE AND UNACCOMPANIED?
HUFF
HUFF
E-EVERYONE'S BUSY...
I C-CAME TO SEE I-IF YOU NEED ANYTHING F-FOR THE WINTER.


I THINK WE'LL NEED NEW PARTITIONS FOR THESE ENERGETIC FELLERS.
BUT OUR TOOLS ARE OLD, AND WE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH WOOD.

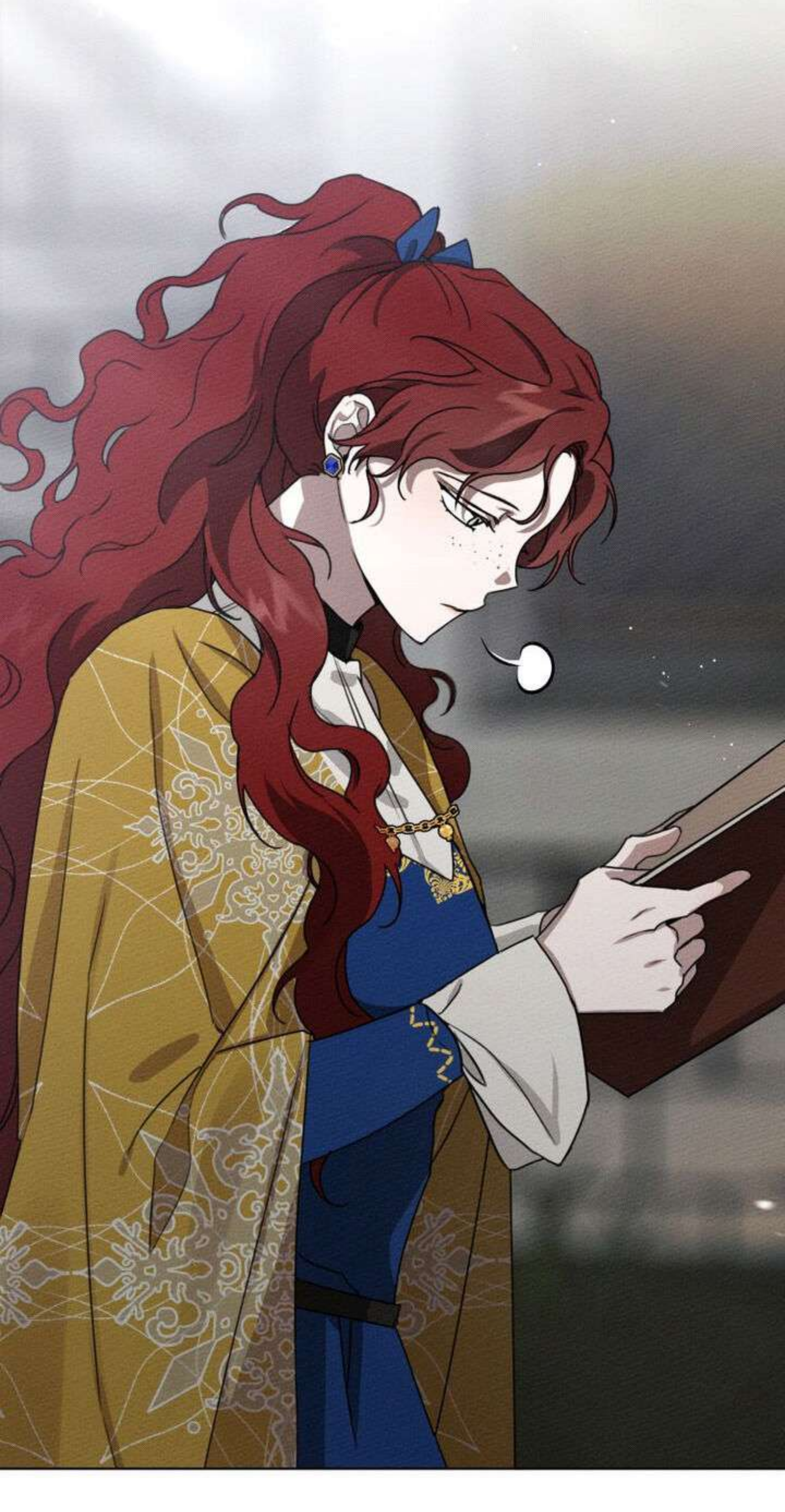

I-I UNDERSTAND. DO YOU N-NEED ANYTHING ELSE?
WE'LL ALSO NEED MORE HAY TO LAST US THE WINTER, MY LADY.

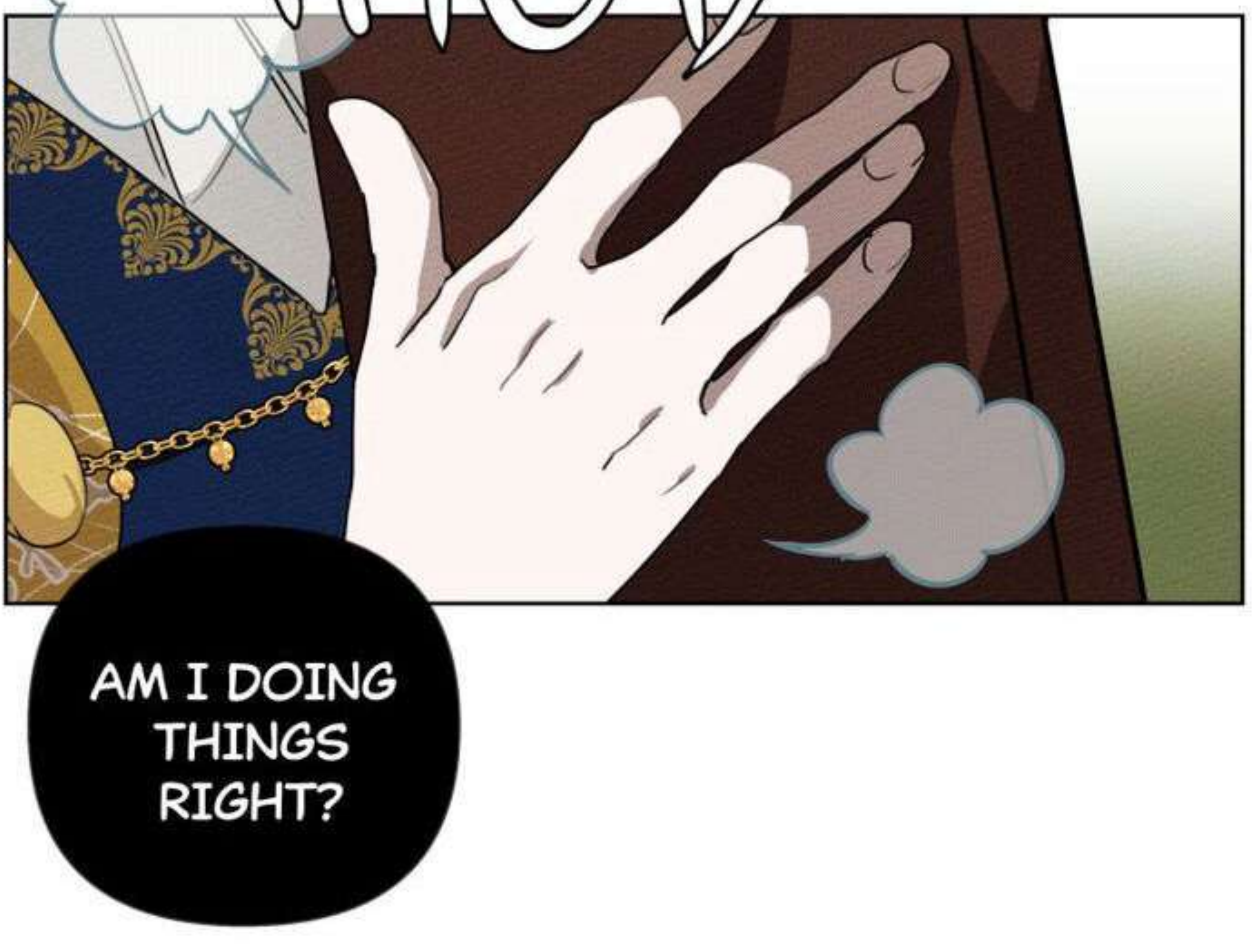

I'LL P-PUT IN AN ORDER FOR THOSE THINGS.

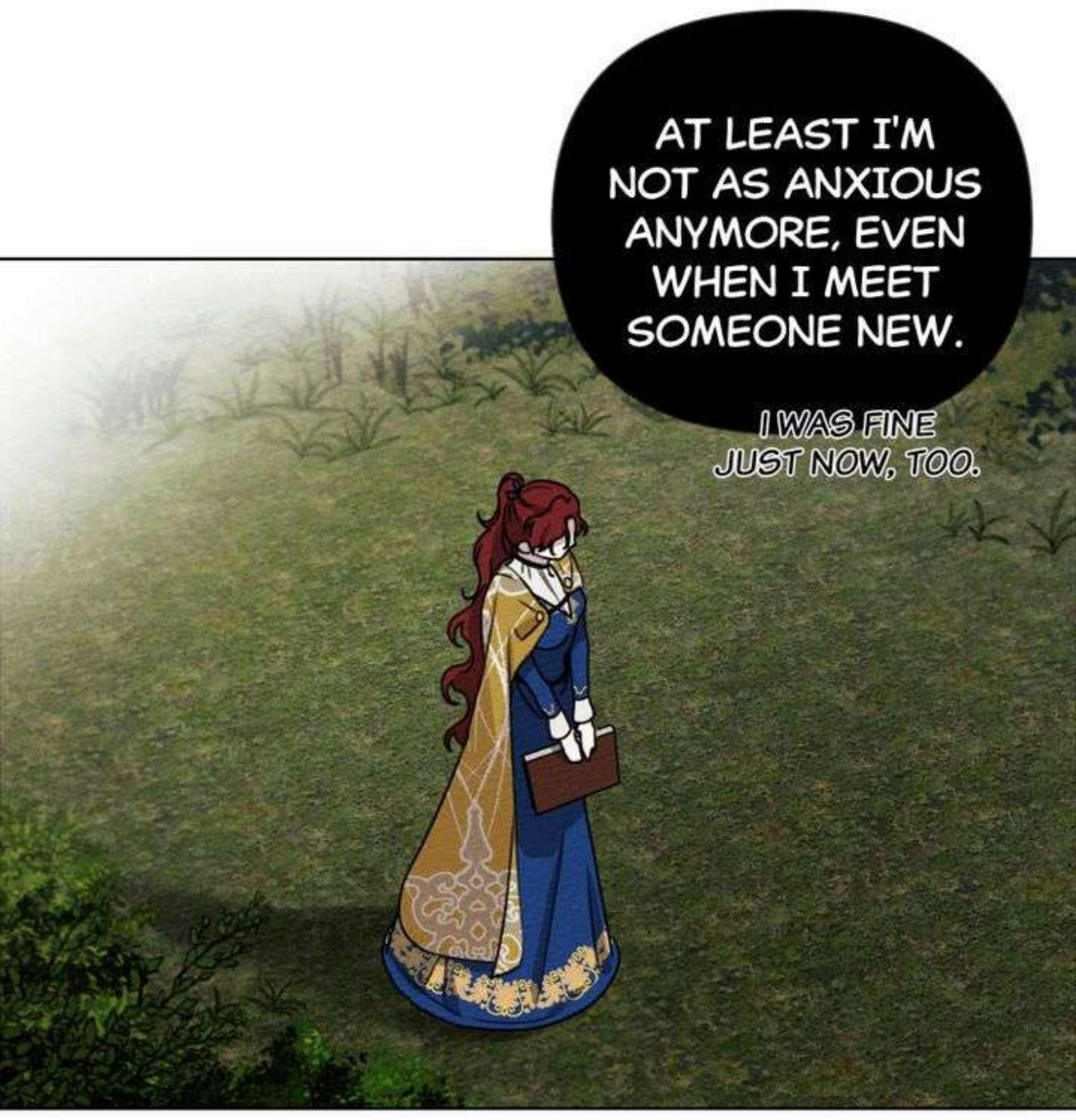

BLESS YOU, MY LADY! THANK YOU KINDLY.

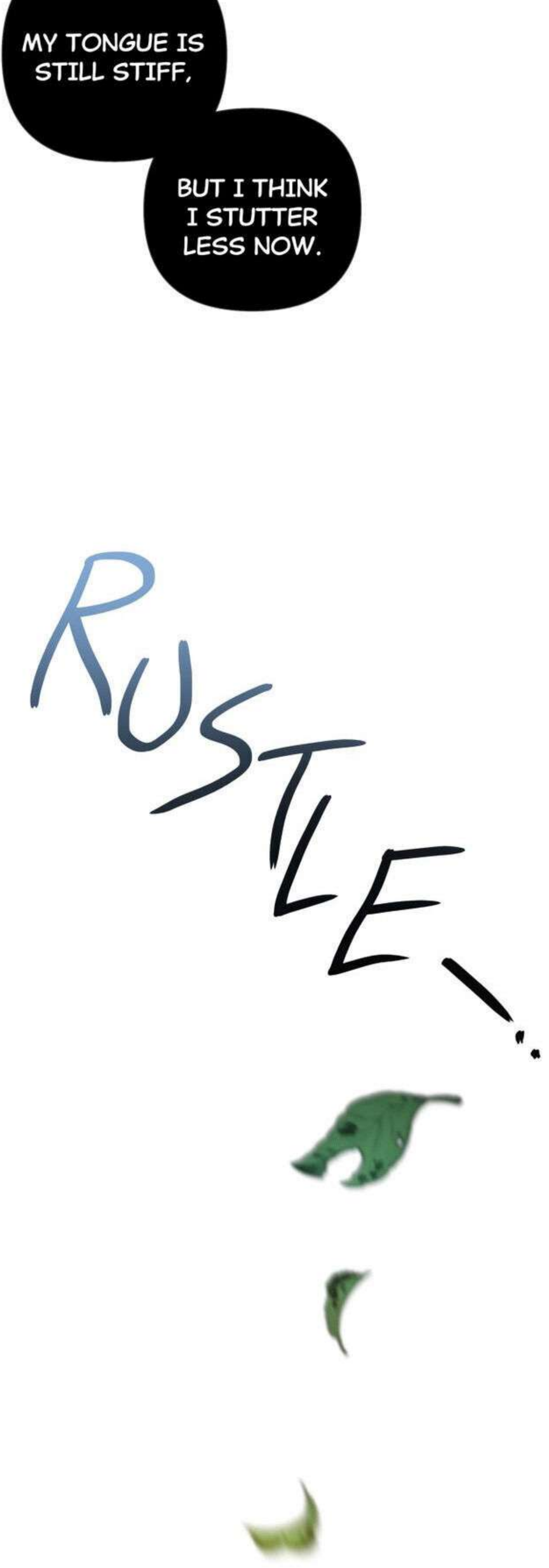
I'LL ORDER WOOD,
TOOLS, AND HAY FOR
THE STABLES, AND...

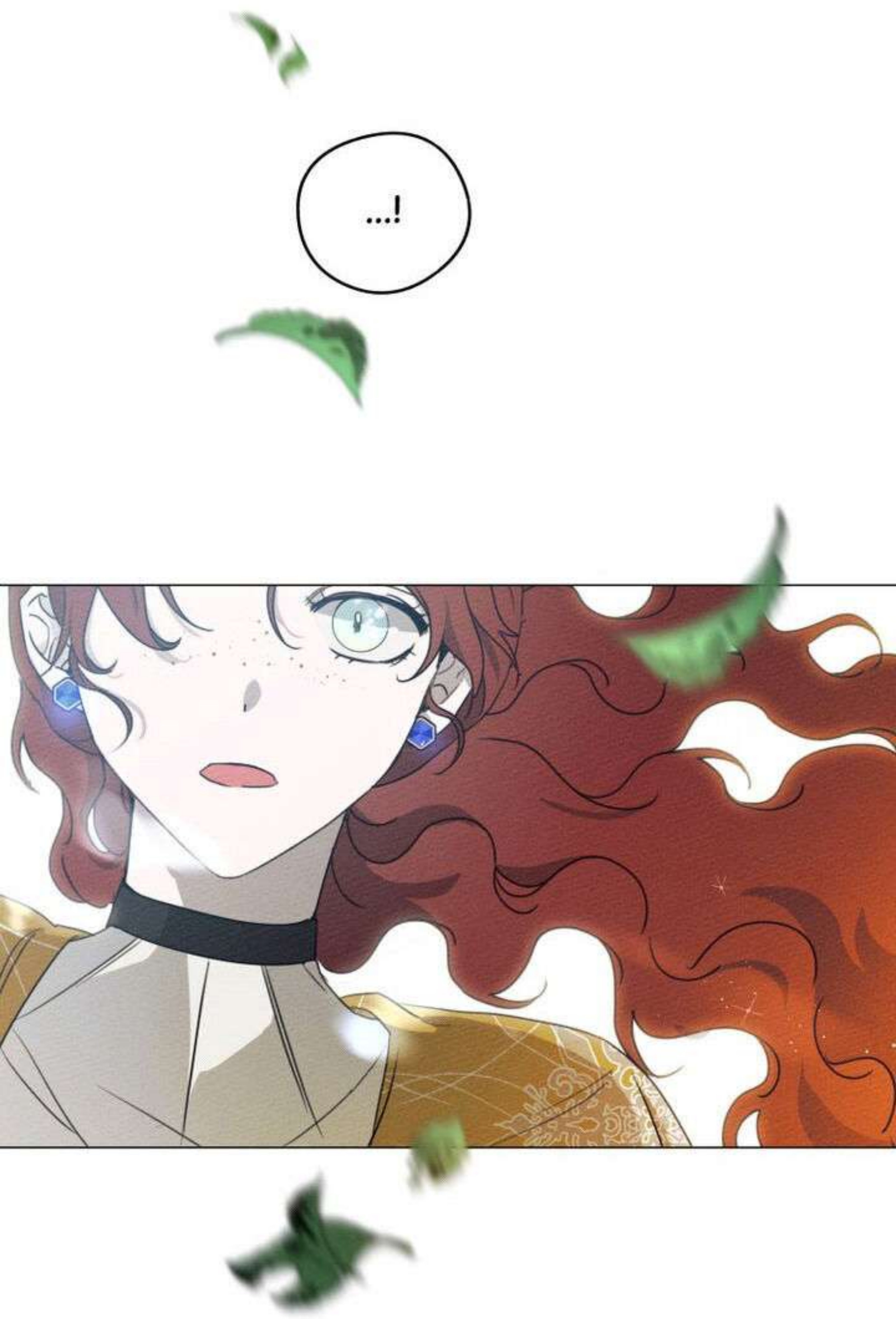
MANAGING A CASTLE
ISN'T EASY.

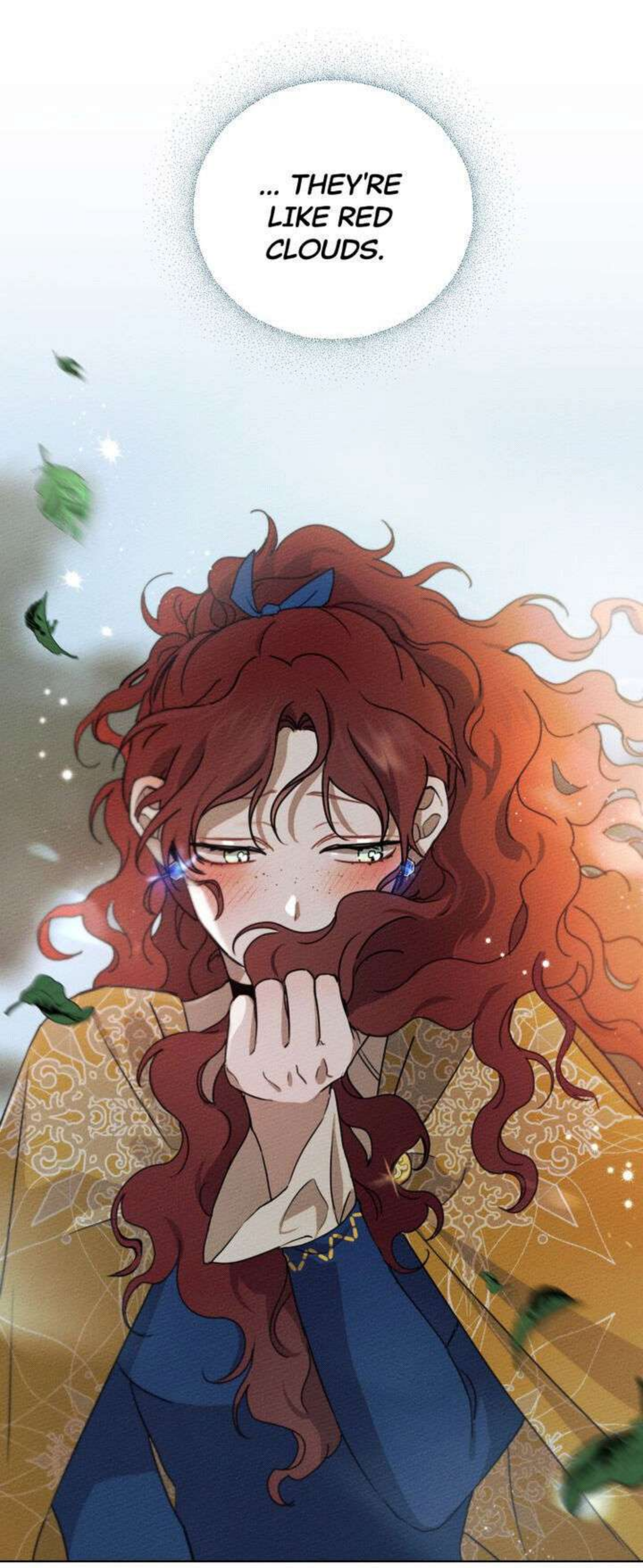



THUD-
AM I DOING
THINGS
RIGHT?


AT LEAST I'M NOT AS ANXIOUS ANYMORE, EVEN WHEN I MEET SOMEONE NEW.
I WAS FINE JUST NOW, TOO.


MY TONGUE IS STILL STIFF,
BUT I THINK I STUTTER LESS NOW.
RUSTLE...

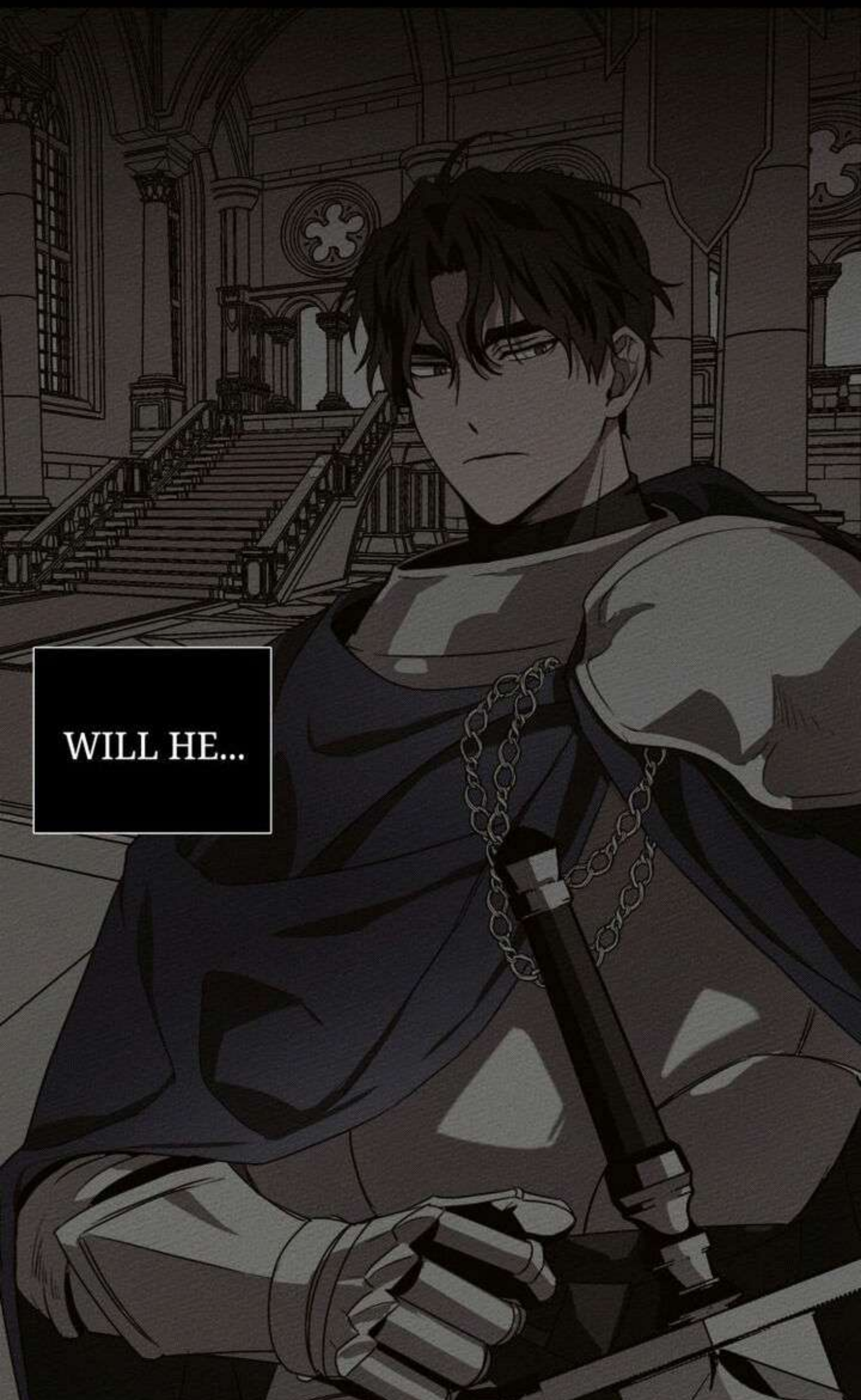



... THEY'RE LIKE RED CLOUDS.

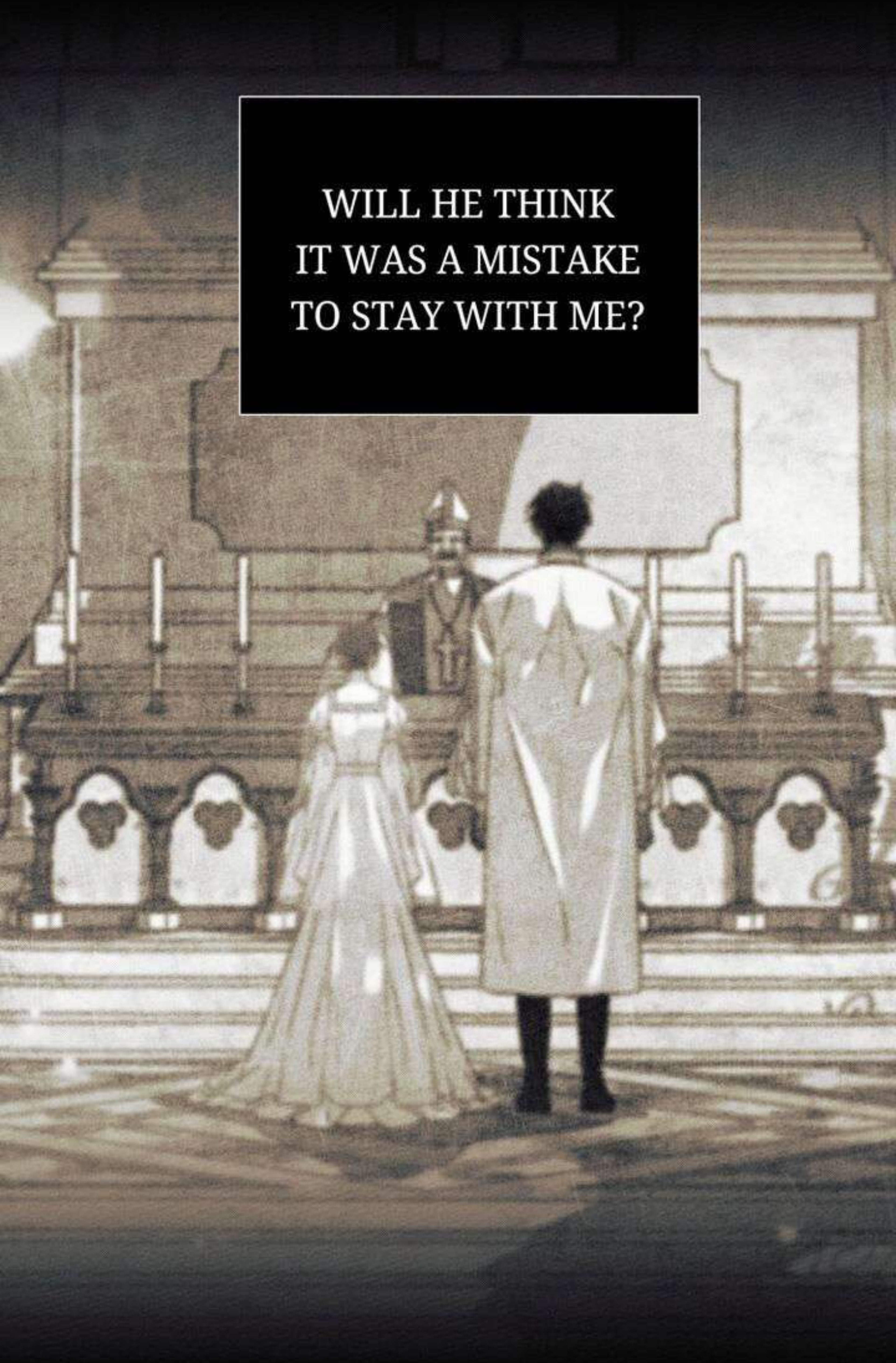
RIFTAN...

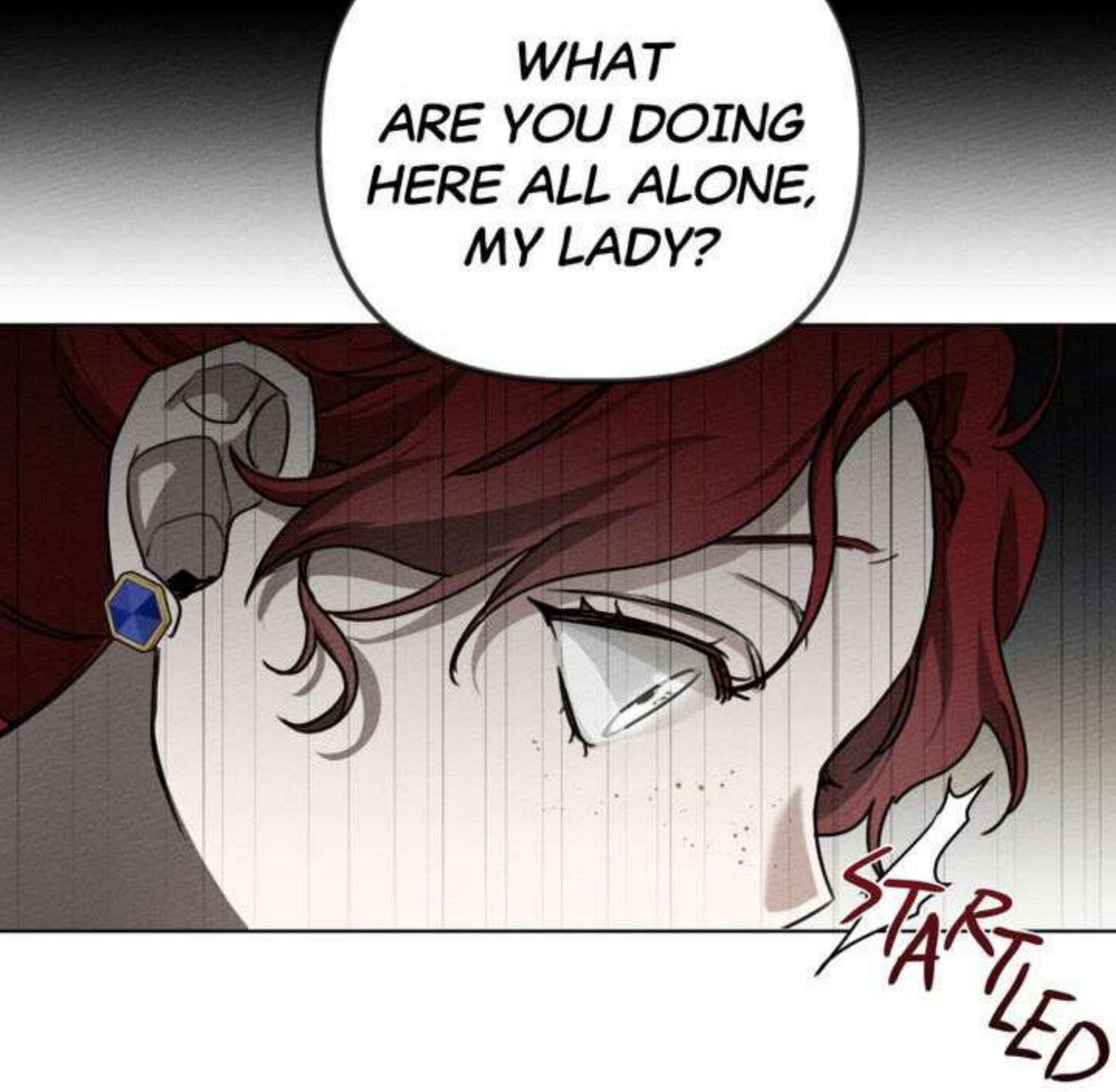
HE'S ARRIVED SAFELY...
HE'S GOING TO LOOK SO GALLANT DURING THE VICTORY CELEBRATION.
AND I'M SURE MANY LADIES WILL FALL IN LOVE WITH HIM. HE'S A HERO OF THE CONTINENT

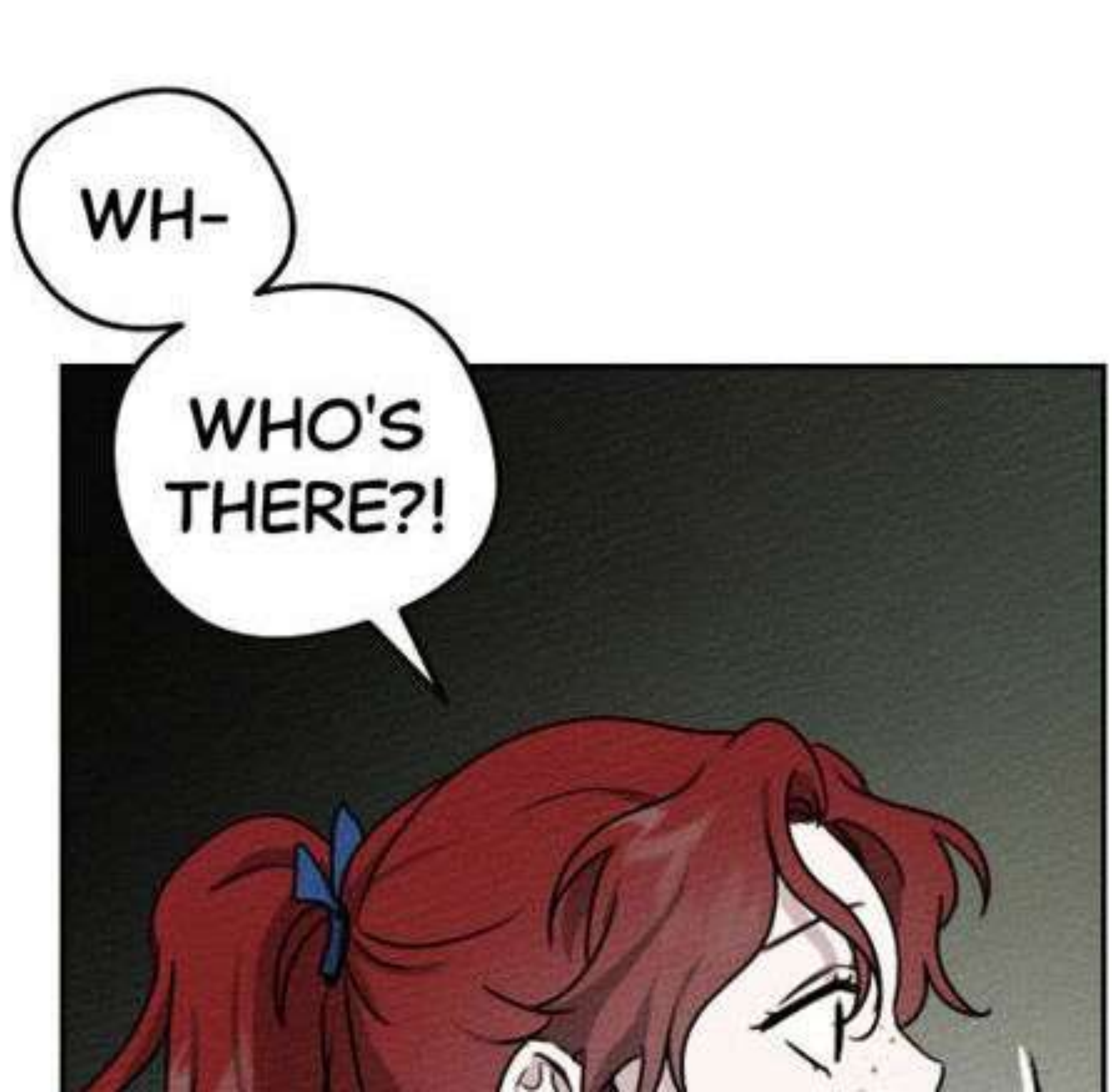
IF REFINED,
BEAUTIFUL
NOBLE LADIES
TRY TO SEDUCE
HIM,

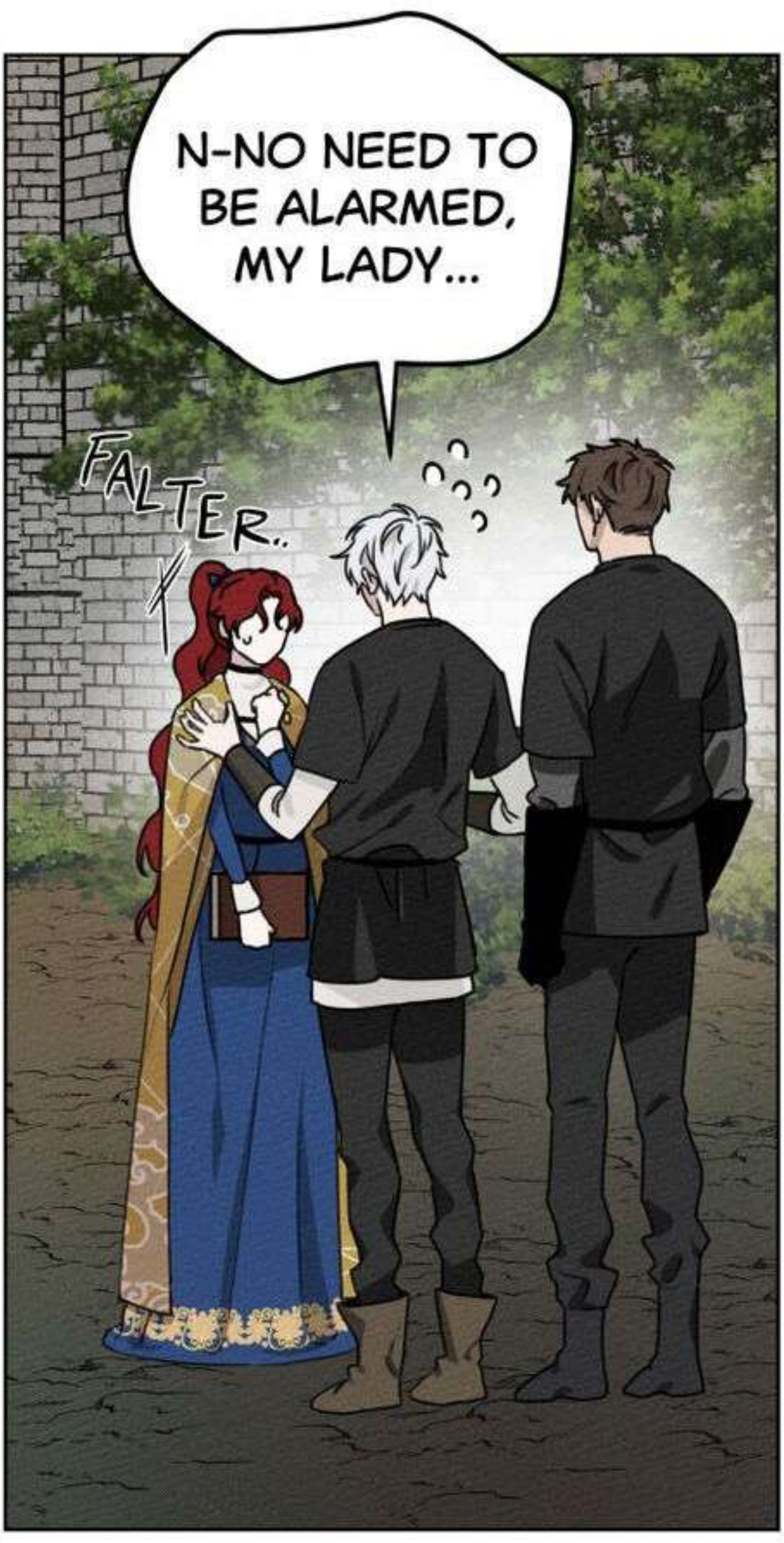


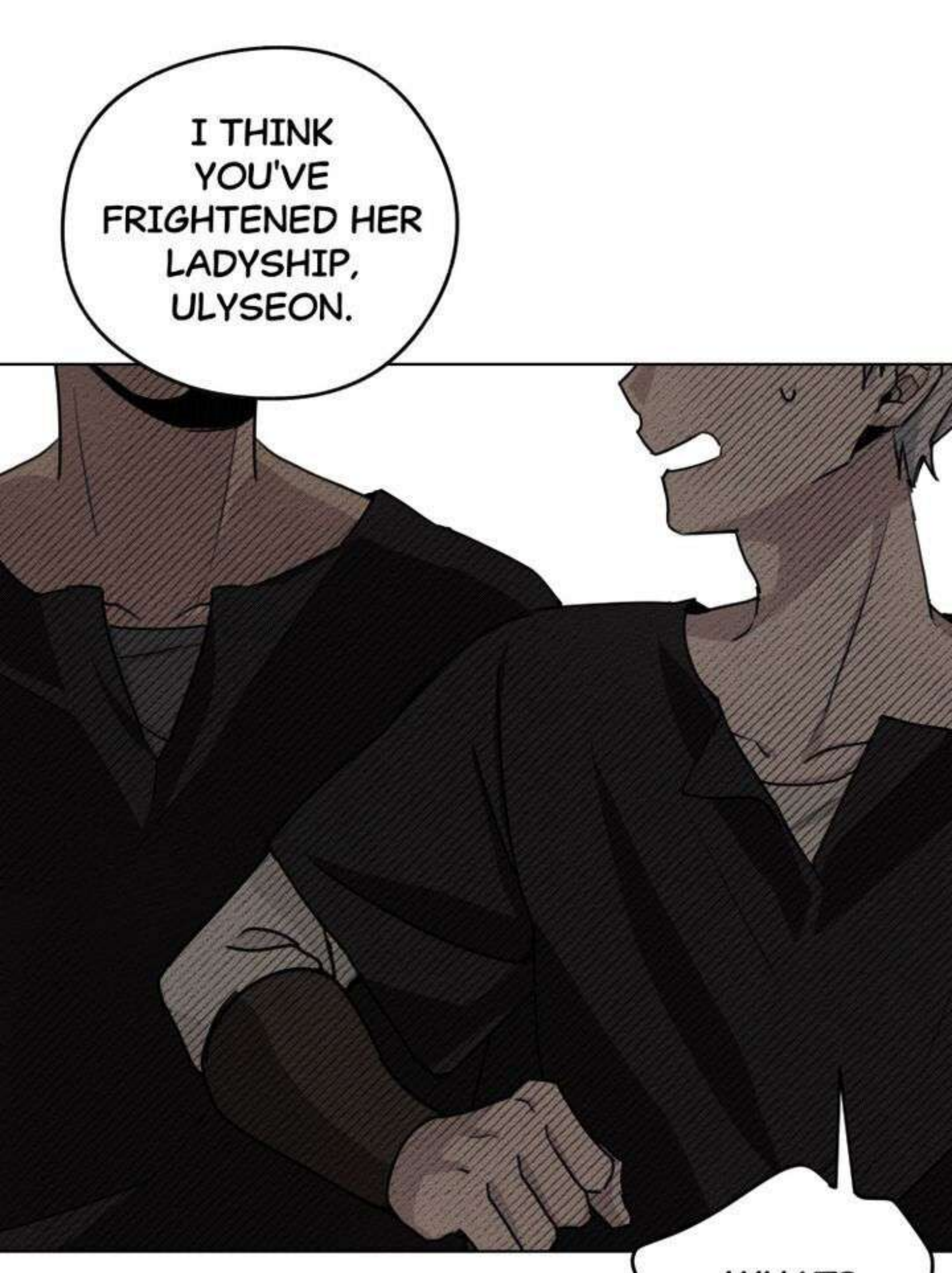
REGRET
HIS DECISION?


WILL HE THINK IT WAS A MISTAKE TO STAY WITH ME?


WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE ALL ALONE, MY LADY?
STARTLED


WH-
WHO'S THERE?!


N-NO NEED TO BE ALARMED, MY LADY...
FALTER..


I THINK YOU'VE FRIGHTENED HER LADYSHIP, ULYSEON.
WHAT? NO WAY!

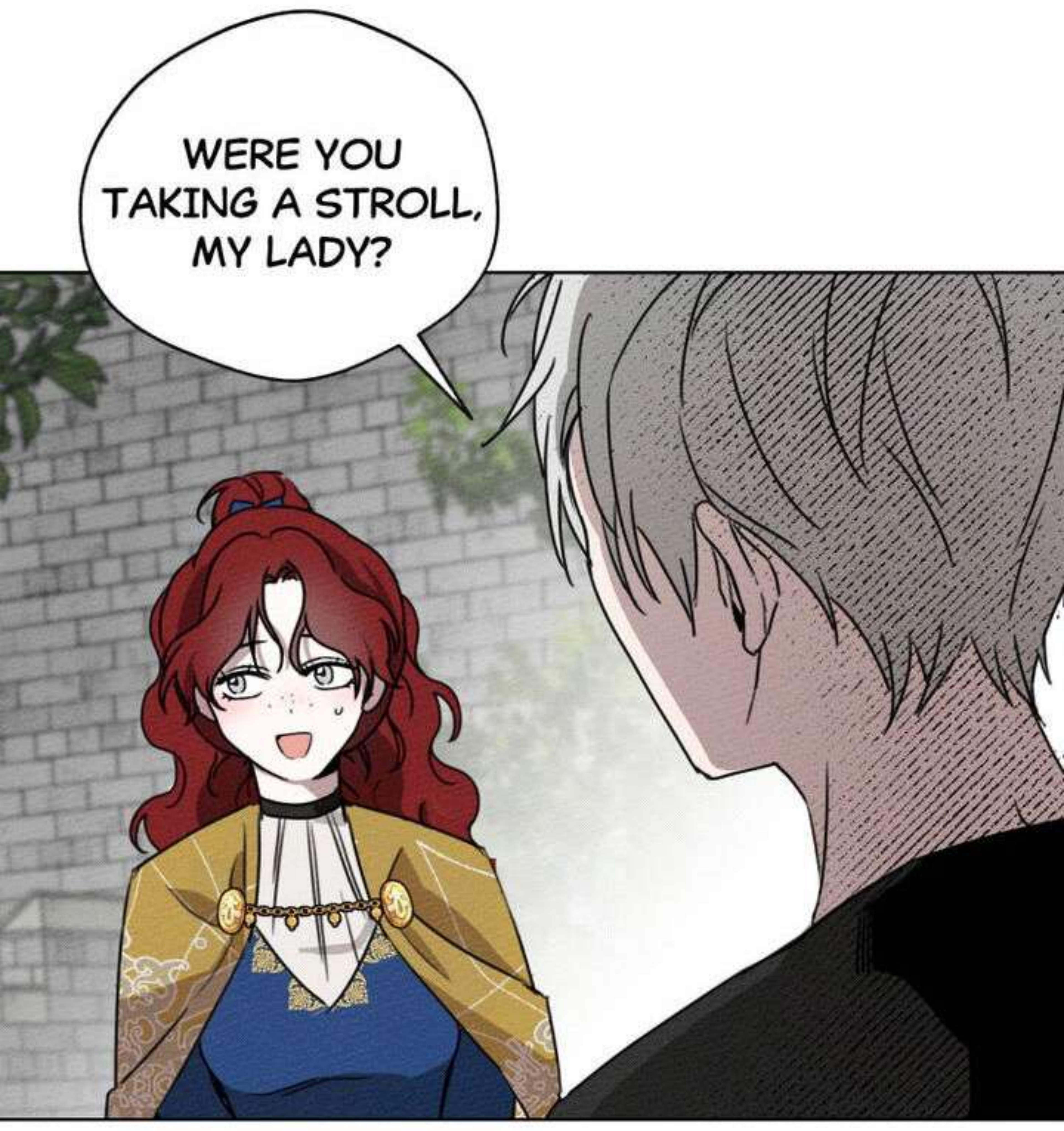
OH, THEY'RE THE SQUIRES I SAW AT THE BANQUET.
!!
I-IT'S ALL RIGHT!
I... UM...
WHAT SHOULD I CALL THEM?

OH!

FWIP!

PLEASE PARDON MY LATE INTRODUCTION, MY LADY. I AM ULYSEON ROVAR.
I WILL BE KNIGHTED NEXT YEAR.
GARROW LIVAKION, MY LADY.

MAXIMILIAN... C-CALYPSE.



WERE YOU TAKING A STROLL, MY LADY?
N-NO... I WAS INSPECTING THE CASTLE.
WE MAY BE INSIDE THE CASTLE, BUT IT'S DANGEROUS FOR YOU
TO WANDER ON YOUR OWN, MY LADY. ESPECIALLY WITH ALL THE FOREIGNERS VISITING RECENTLY...

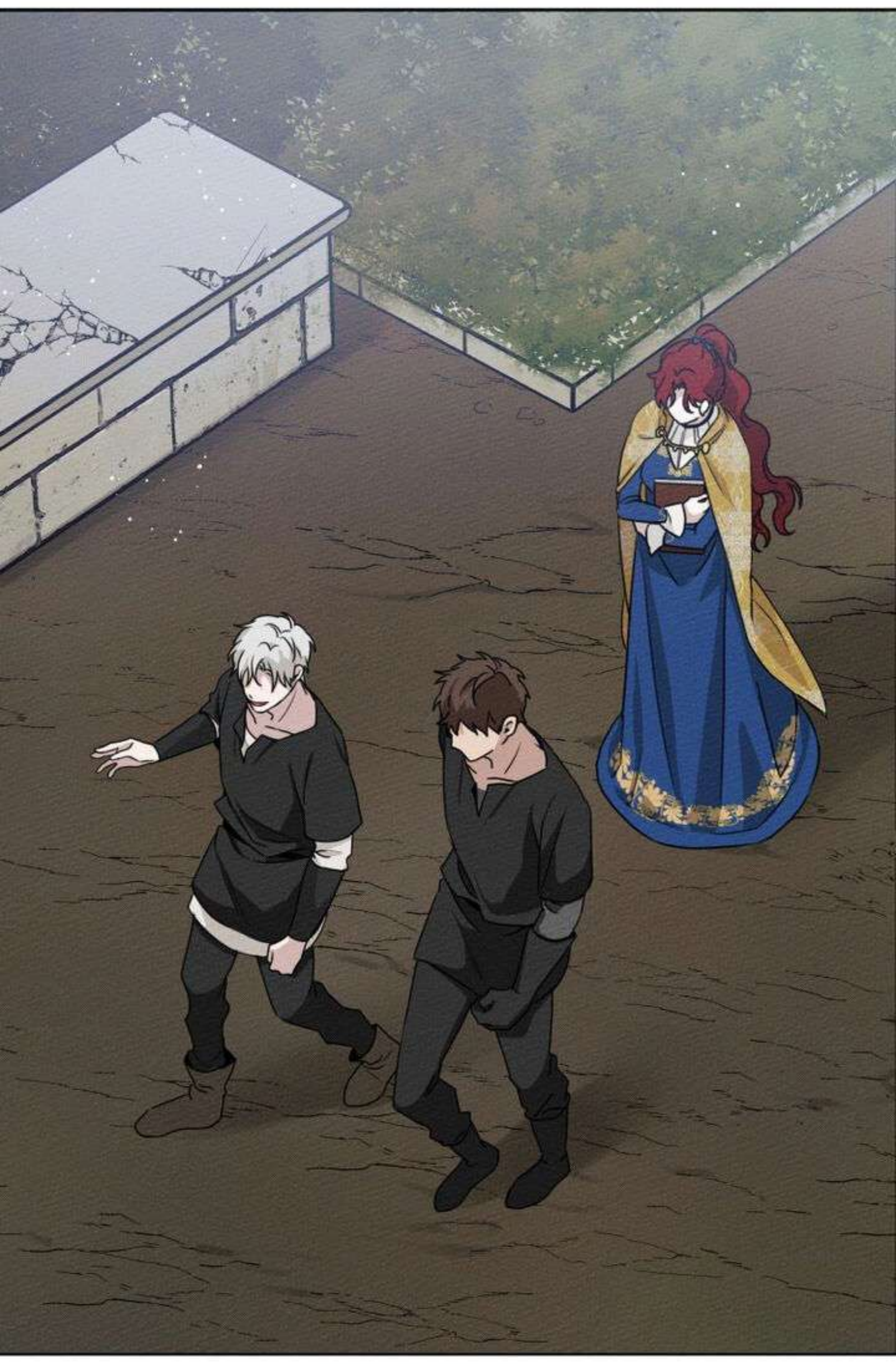
WOULD YOU ALLOW ME TO ESCORT YOU, MY LADY?
I'M NOT A KNIGHT YET, BUT I'LL PROTECT YOU WITH MY LIFE!

P-PARDON?
N-NO, IT'S FINE.

OF COURSE... YOU MUST NOT FIND ME TRUSTWORTHY.

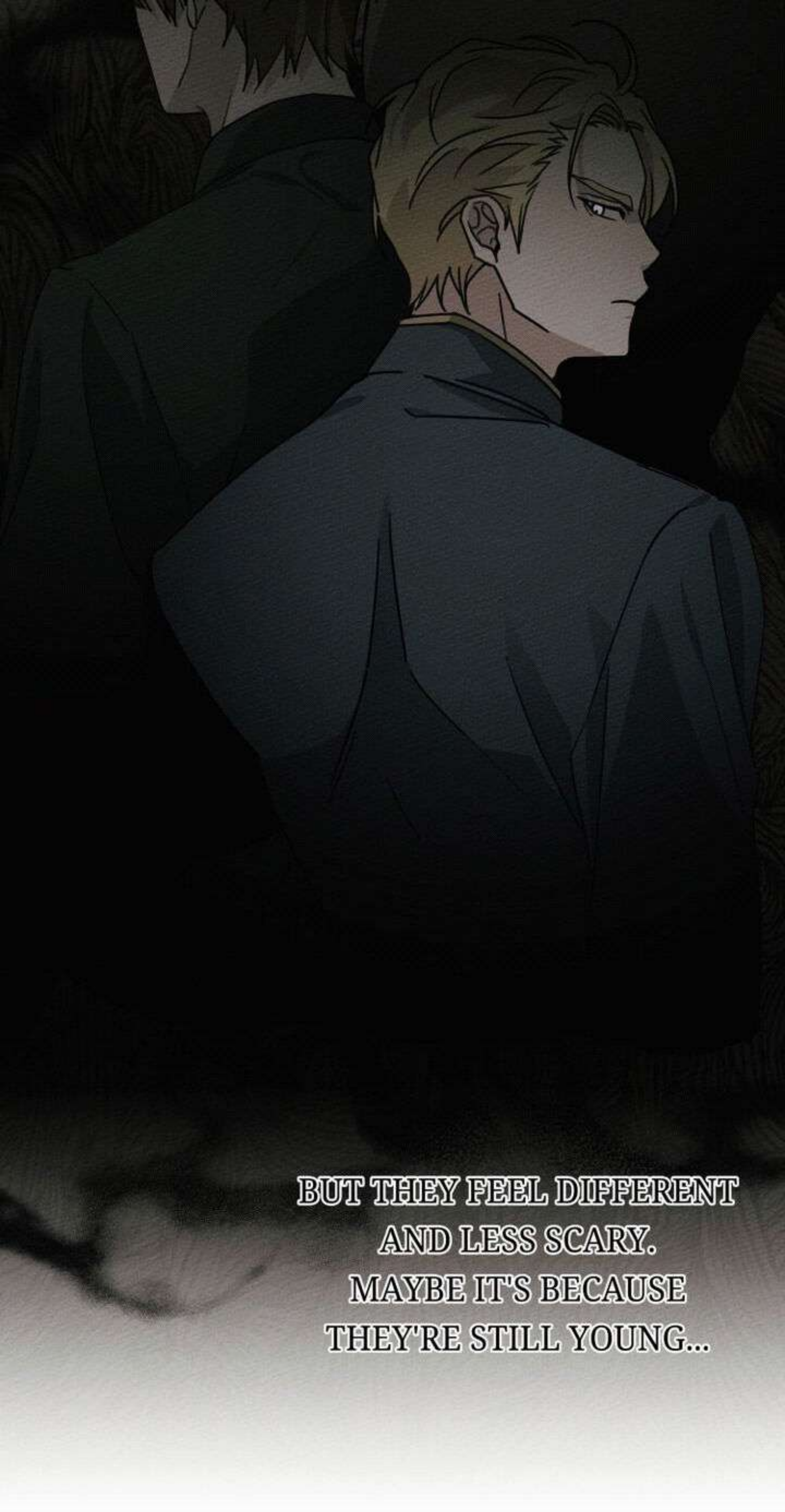
OH... M-MAYBE YOU CAN E-ESCORT ME FOR A BIT...

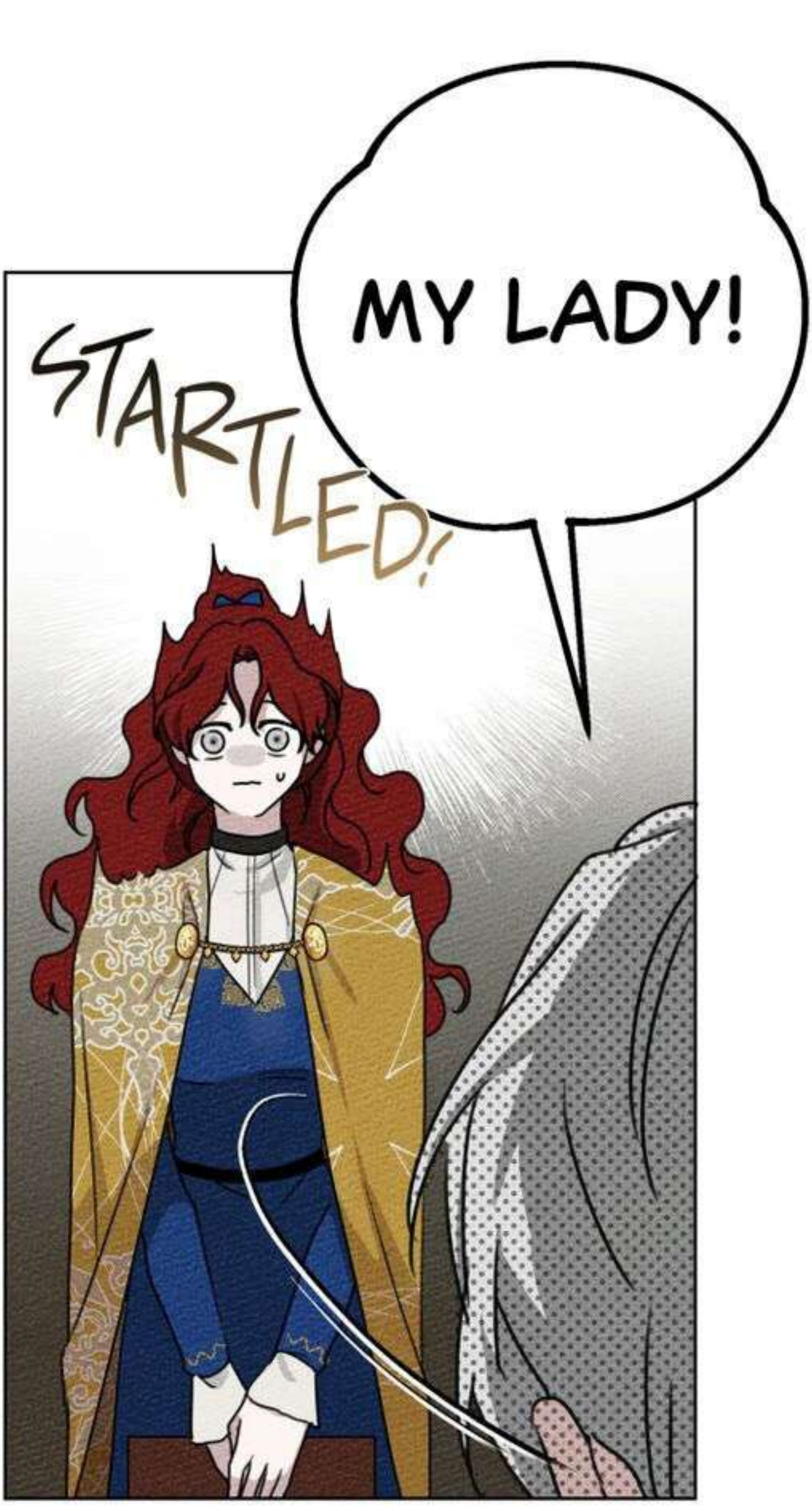
I WON'T LET YOU DOWN, MY LADY!



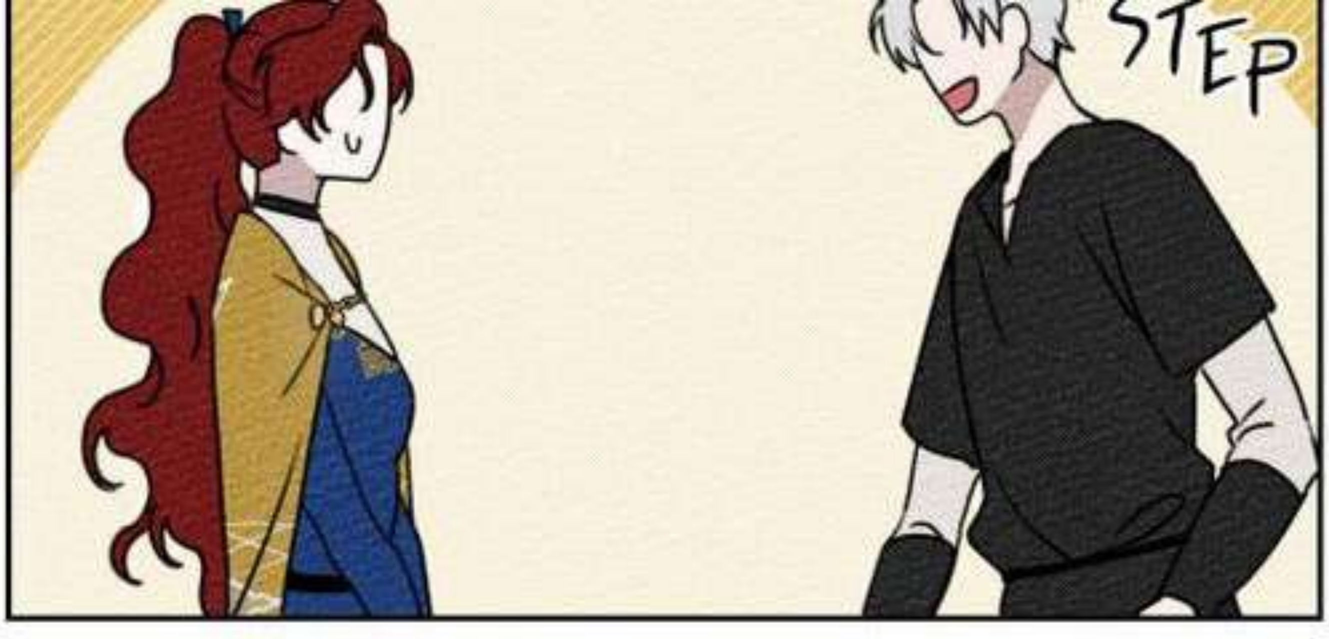
IS THIS ALL RIGHT?

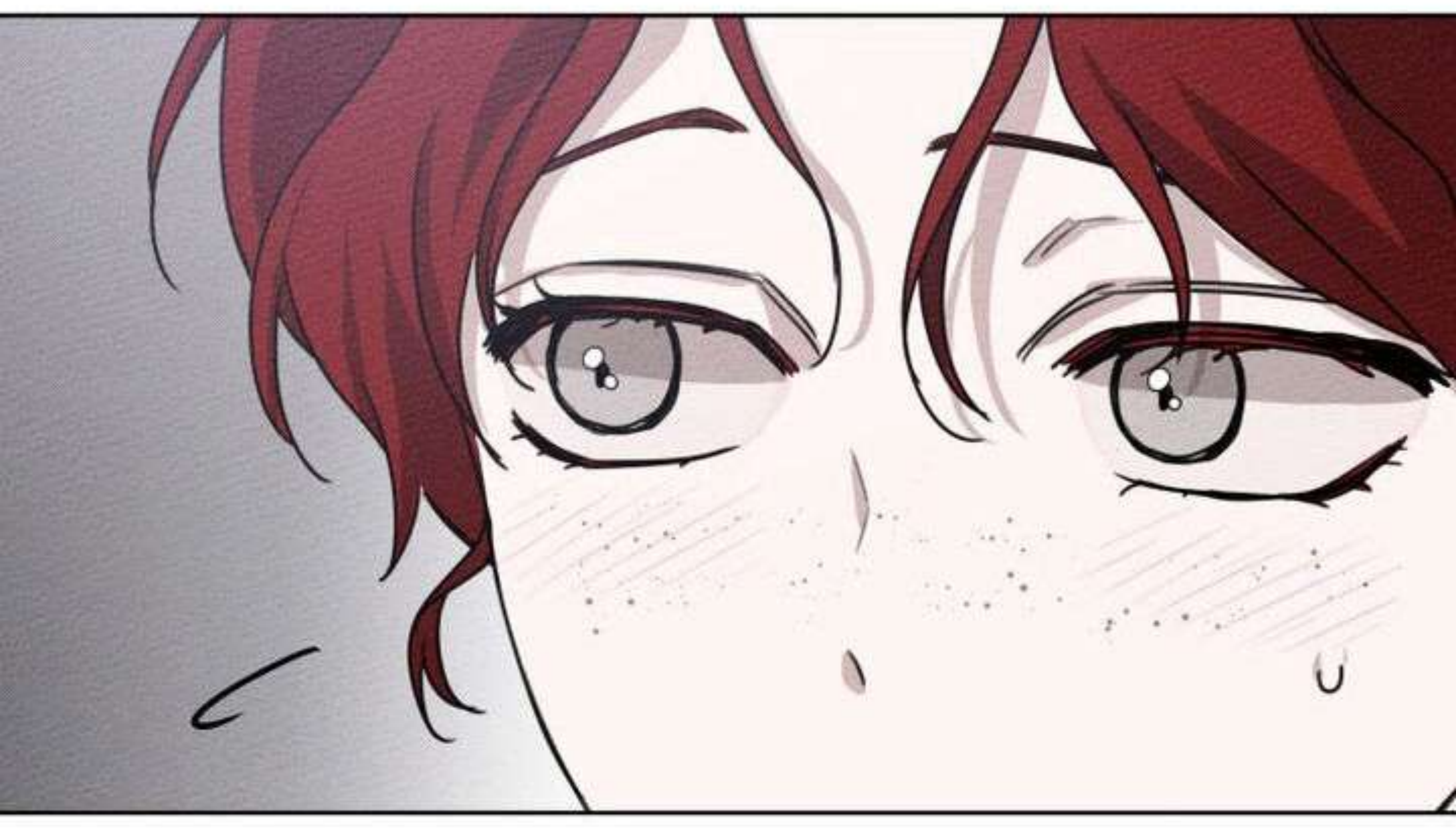
THE OTHER KNIGHTS
ARE SCARY,

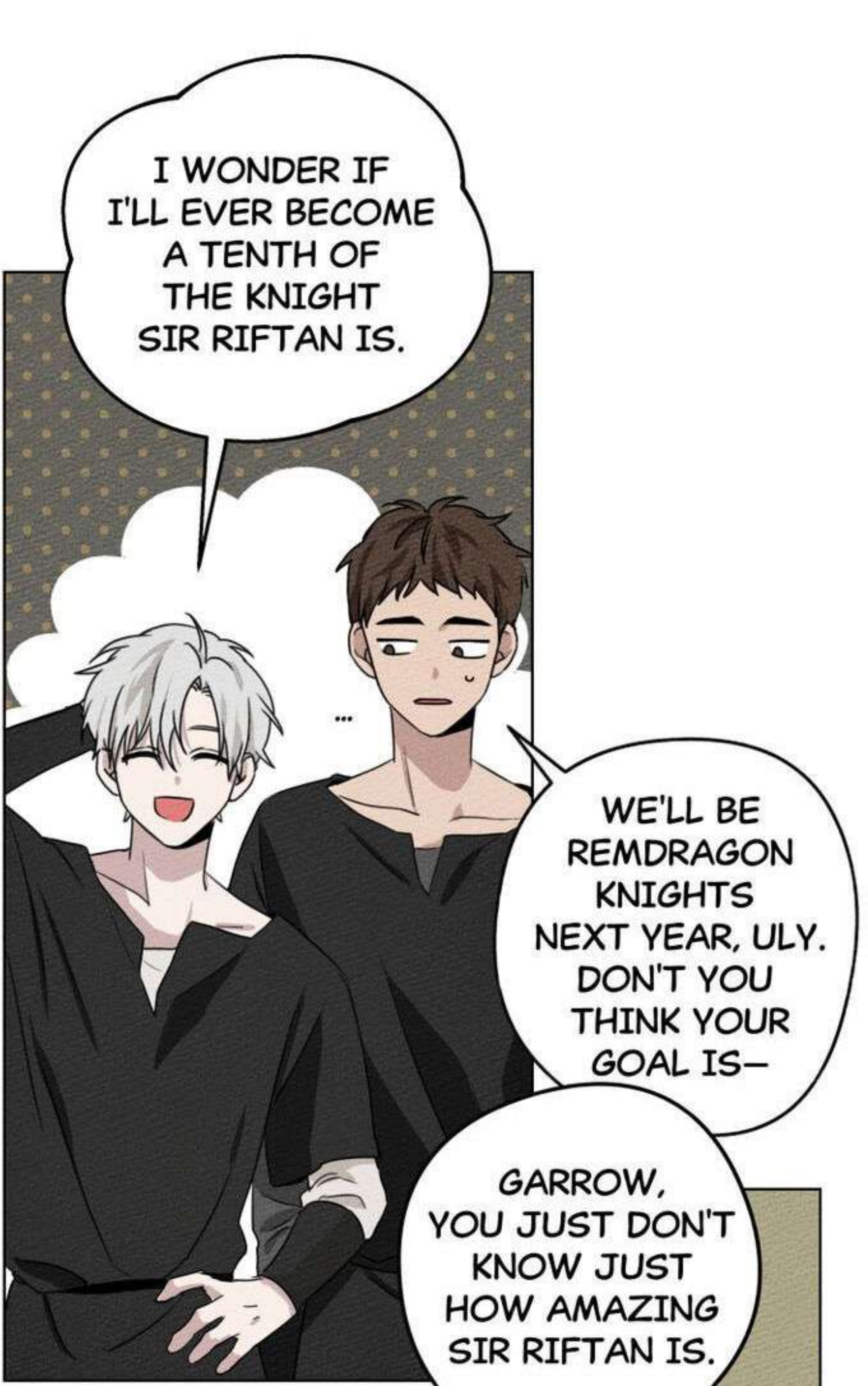

BUT THEY FEEL DIFFERENT
AND LESS SCARY.
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE
THEY'RE STILL YOUNG...

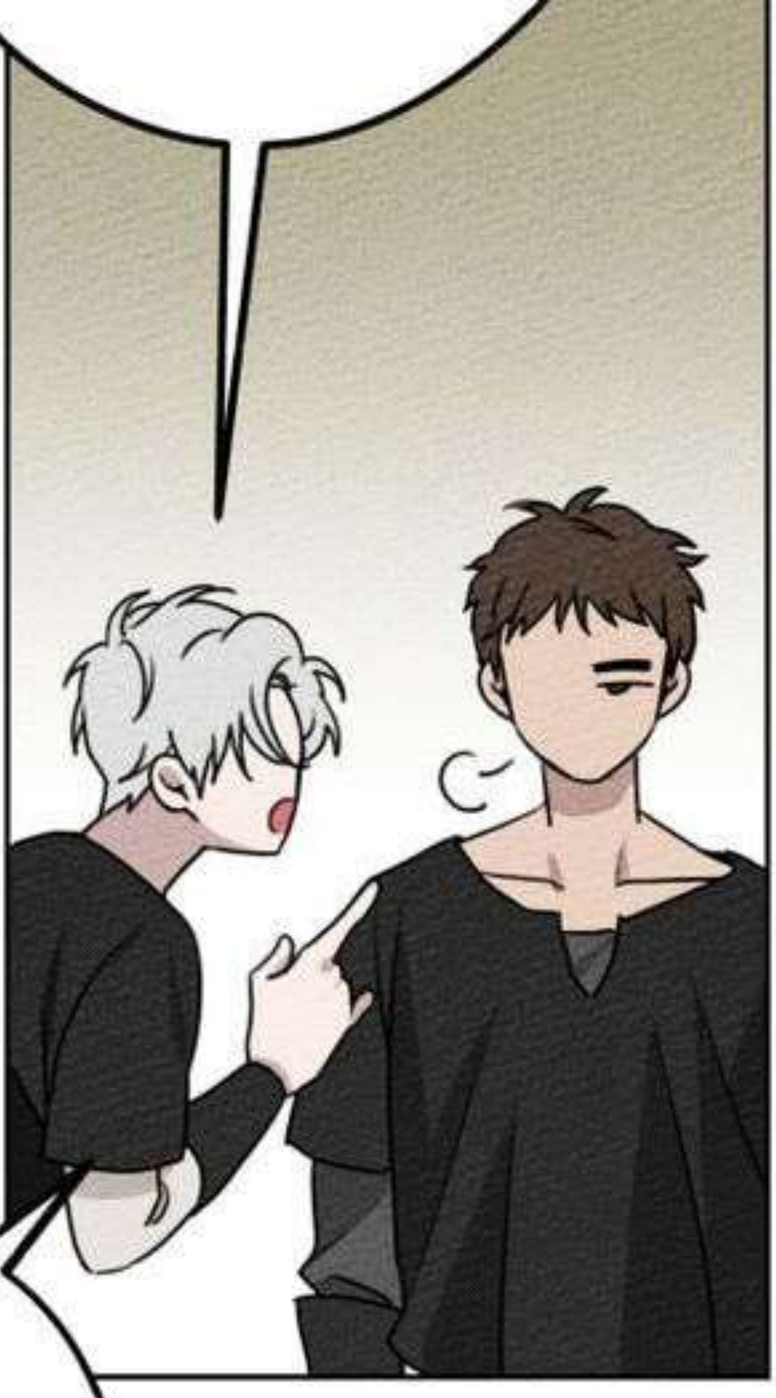

MY LADY!
STARTLED!

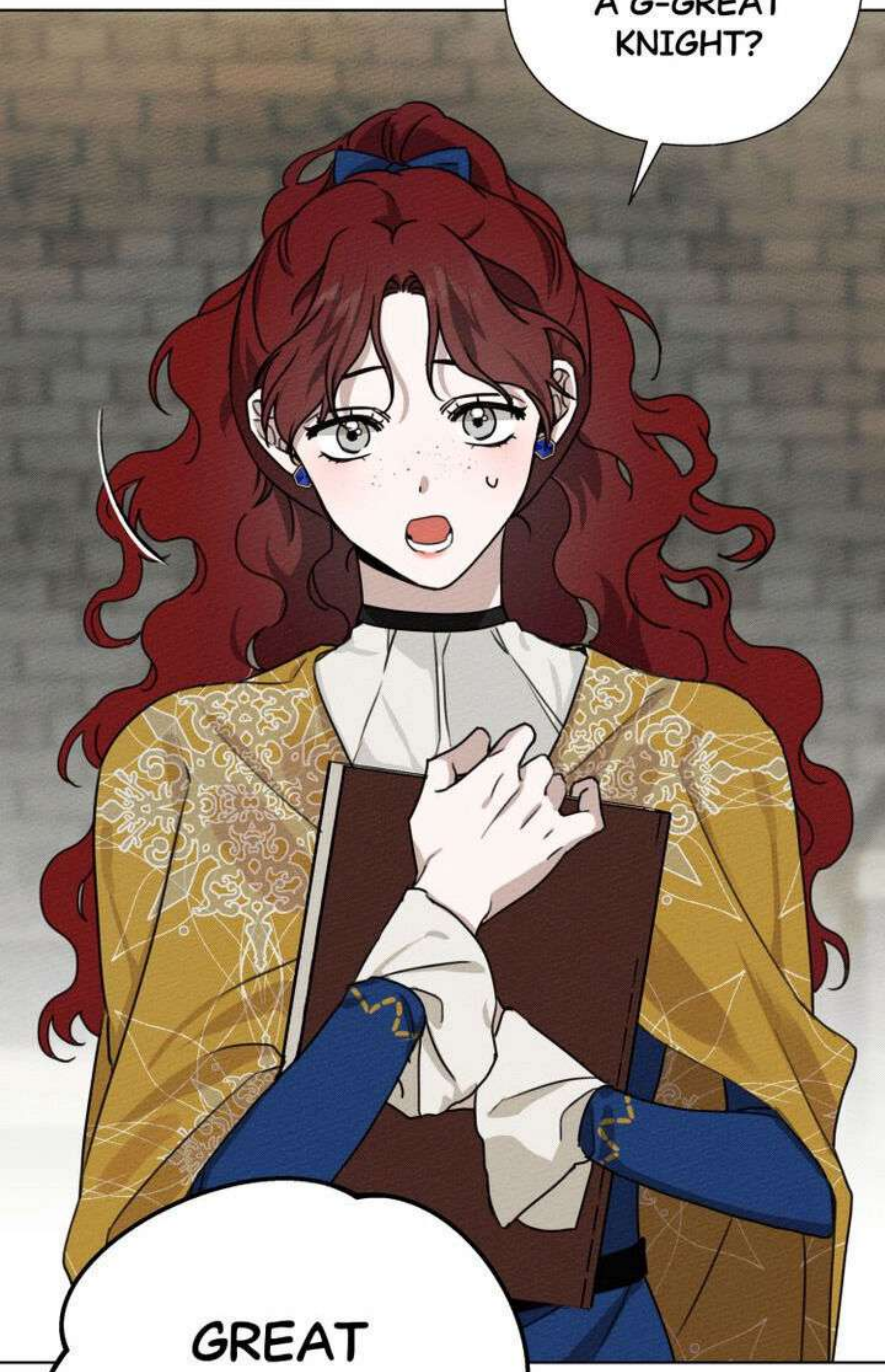
WHY WERE YOU VISITING THE FORGE?
STEP


STEP

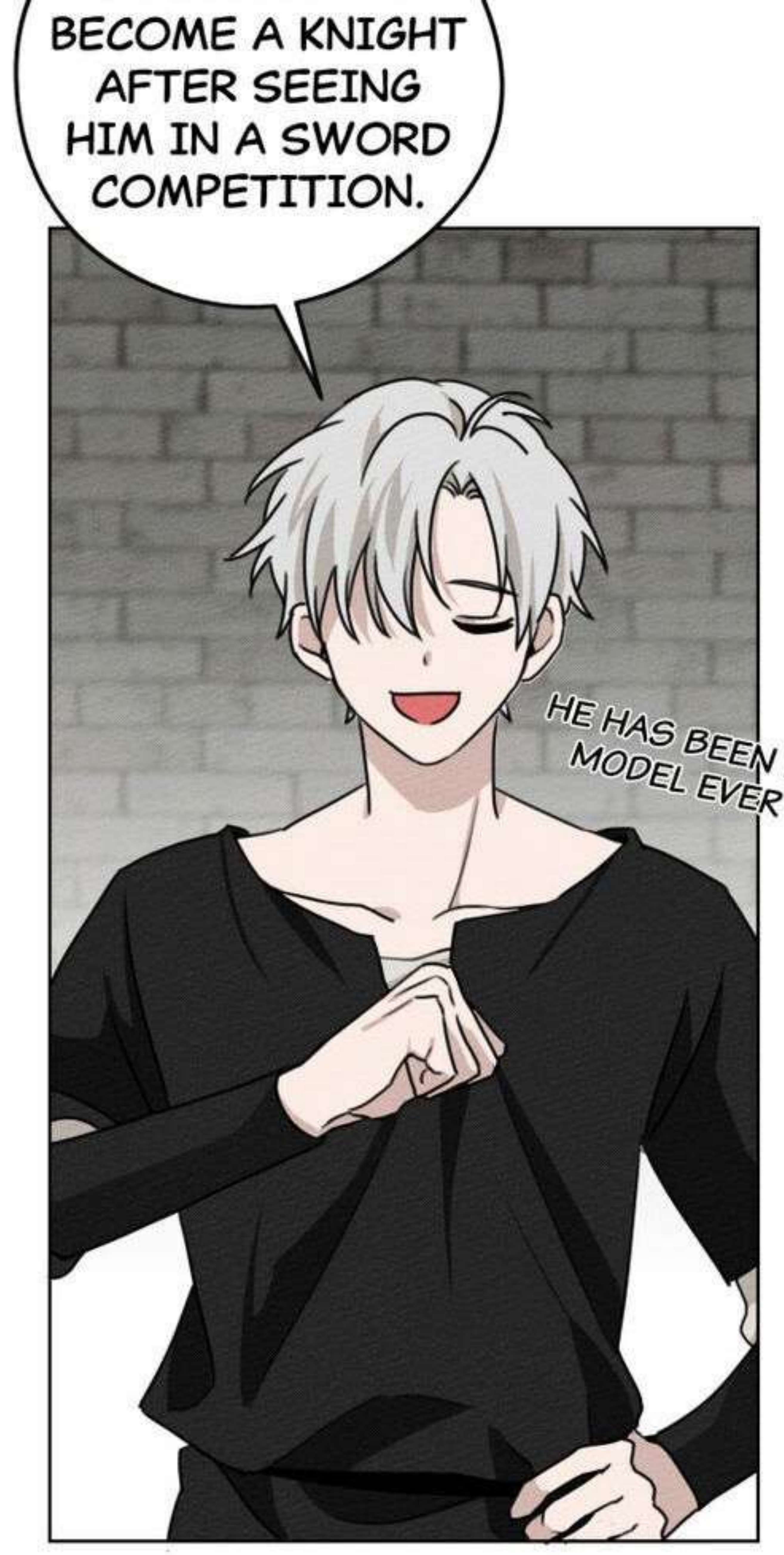

I-I HEARD THAT M-MERCHANTS VISIT LESS D-DURING WINTER...
AND I WANTED TO SEE I-IF THEY N-NEEDED A-ANYTHING.

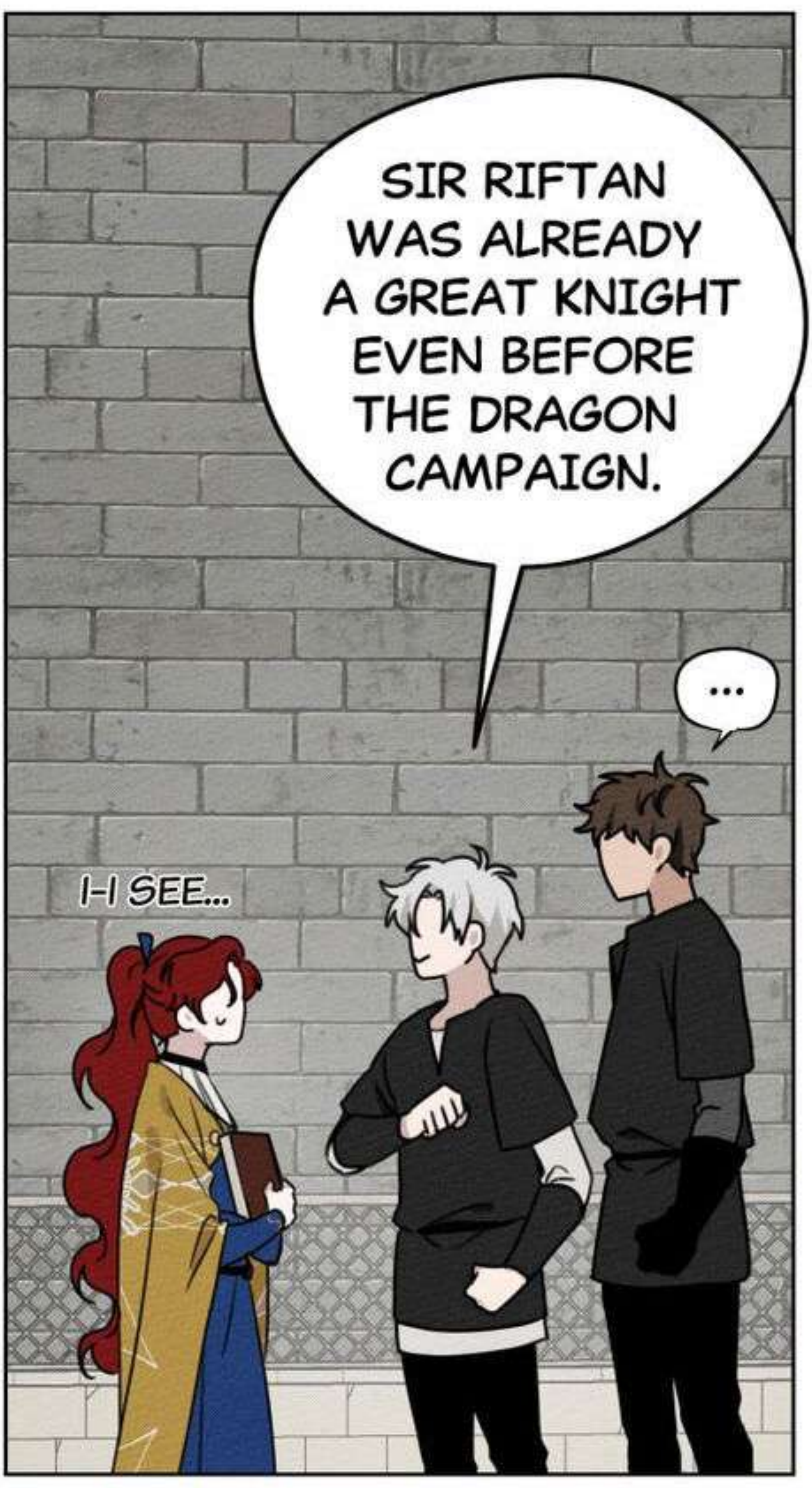

OH- WE WERE GOING TO THE FORGE AS WELL! I BROKE MY SWORD DURING PRACTICE.
IT'S THE SECOND TIME THIS MONTH...
I WONDER IF I'LL EVER BECOME A TENTH OF THE KNIGHT SIR RIFTAN IS.
...
WE'LL BE REMDRAGON KNIGHTS NEXT YEAR, ULY. DON'T YOU THINK YOUR GOAL IS—
GARROW, YOU JUST DON'T KNOW JUST HOW AMAZING SIR RIFTAN IS.

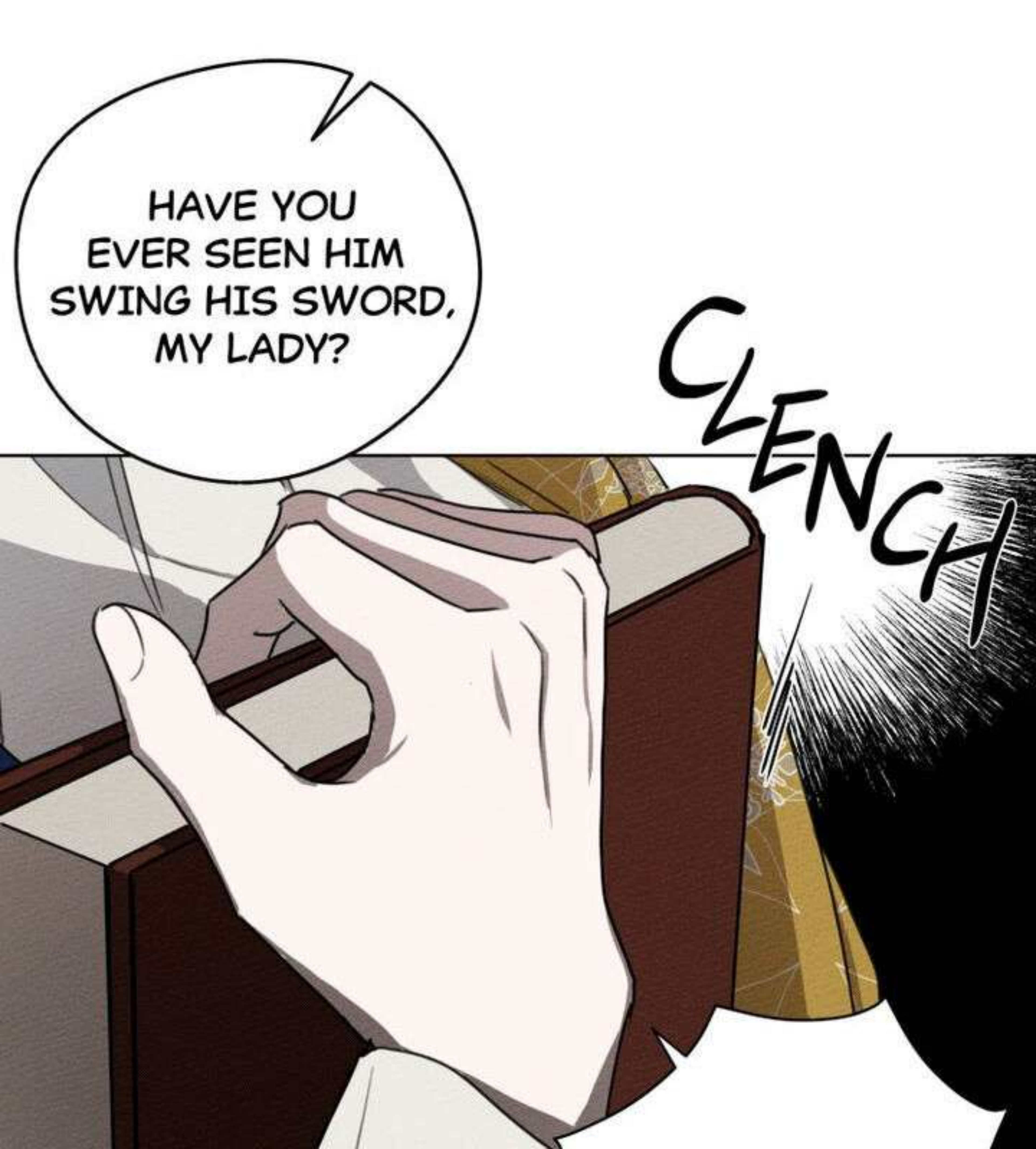

FORGET ONE-TENTH! BECOMING EVEN ONE-HUNDREDTH OF THE KNIGHT HE IS WOULD BE A NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENT!


I-IS... R-RIFTAN SUCH A G-GREAT KNIGHT?
GREAT DOESN'T EVEN COVER IT!
HE IS THE REINCARNATION OF ROSEM WIGREW AND WITHOUT A DOUBT THE STRONGEST

THE STRONGEST KNIGHT!
HE BEAT SIR SEJULEU AREN OF LIVADON DURING A FRIENDLY COMPETITION SIX YEARS AGO,
AND SIR KUAHEL LEON OF OSIRIYA DURING THE DRAGON CAMPAIGN.
SIR RIFTAN WAS VICTORIOUS OVER TWO OF THE FIVE KNIGHTS WHO ARE CONSIDERED
TO BE ROSEM WIGREW'S REINCARNATIONS!
I DECIDED TO

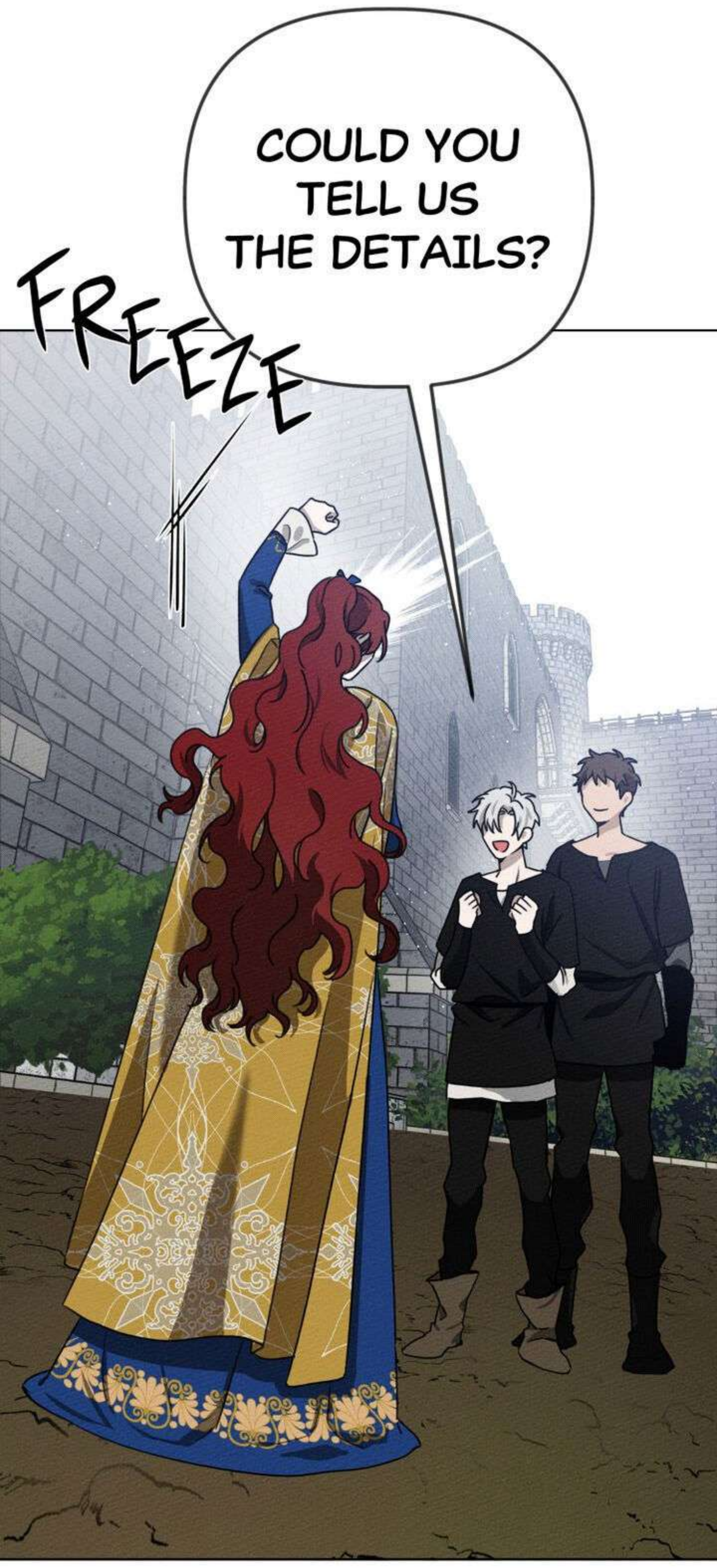

BECOME A KNIGHT AFTER SEEING HIM IN A SWORD COMPETITION.
HE HAS BEEN MY ROLE MODEL EVER SINCE!

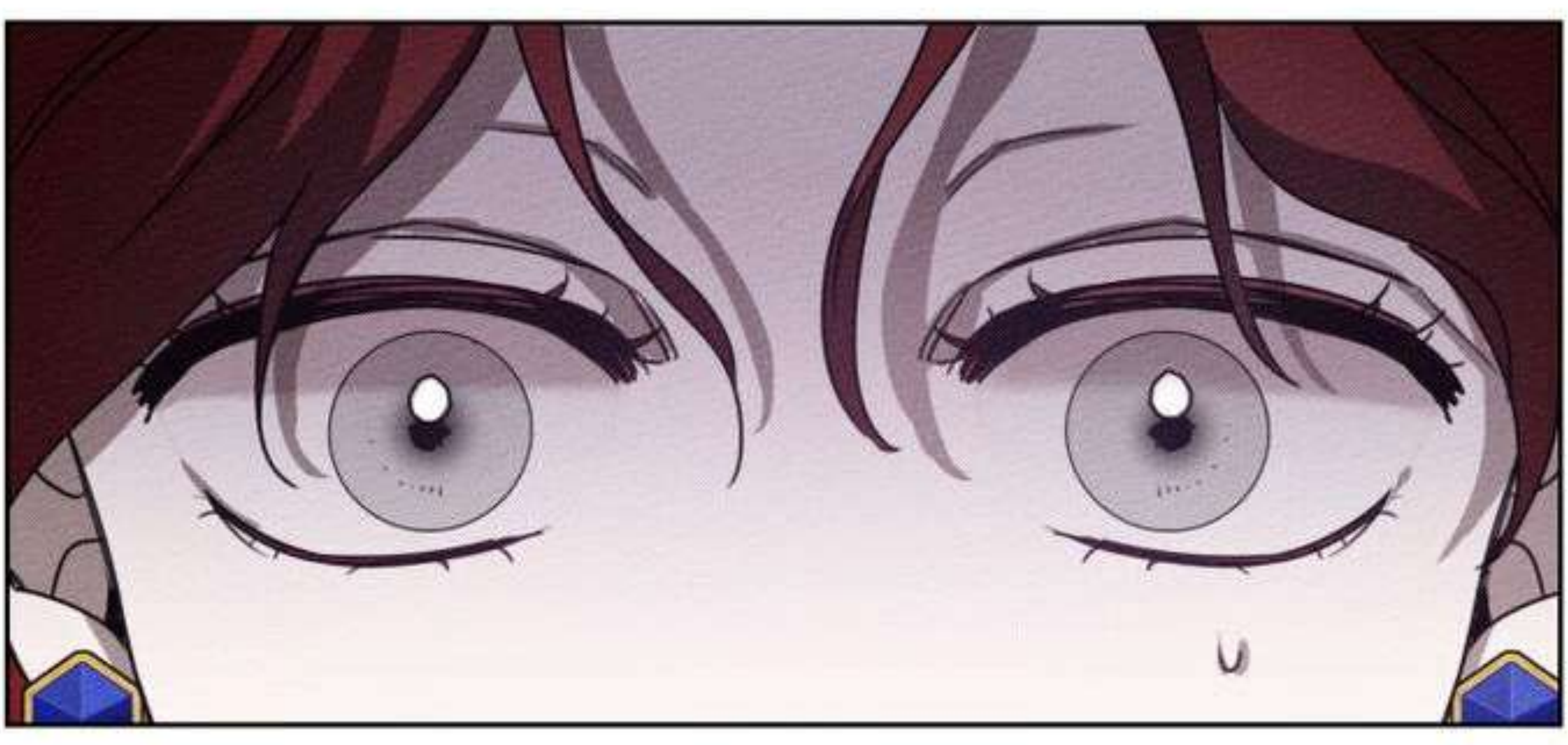

SIR RIFTAN WAS ALREADY A GREAT KNIGHT EVEN BEFORE THE DRAGON CAMPAIGN.
...
I-I SEE...


HAVE YOU EVER SEEN HIM SWING HIS SWORD, MY LADY?
CLENCH

O-OF COURSE I H-HAVE!
DOES THAT QUALIFY?
BUT I DON'T WANT TO SAY I HAVEN'T. I'M HIS WIFE!
U-UM...
I-I SAW RIFTAN C-CUTTING A FULL G-GROWN GIANT...

I-IN HALF
W-WITH MY OWN
T-TWO EYES...!!
A-AND THERE
WERE T-TEN OF
THEM, TOO!
H-HE GOT RID
OF T-THEM ALL
IN THE B-BLINK
OF AN EYE!
WOW~
DID HE
REALLY?
TEN GIANT
OGRES?!


COULD YOU TELL US THE DETAILS?
FREEZE


W-
WELL....